



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

VIRGINIA





600056158V



V I R G I N I A .





"Much do you like best, bambinella mia, the doll, or me?"

P. 7.

VIRGINIA.

A ROMAN SKETCH.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1877.

(All rights reserved.)

251 . d . 921 .

"You will find the ideal life ever beside the real."

THE PARISIANS.

To

C. L. H. D.,

AUTHOR OF

"THE HÔTEL DU PETIT ST. JEAN," "VÈRA," ETC.

This is only a sketch—but because it was outlined in Rome, and filled in at Cannes, I dedicate it to you—and I ask you to accept it, as an expression of the eager gratitude, and passionate sympathy, which your own finished pictures always inspire.

CANNES, February 12th, 1877.



CONTENTS.



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "WE LODGED IN A STREET TOGETHER"	1
II. WAITING FOR HER STORY	20
III. SPERANZA	36
IV. A NEW FRIEND	47
V. AN OLD FRIEND	62
VI. EAVES-DROPPING	81
VII. A SKELETON AT THE FEAST ...	101
VIII. A PASTORAL VISIT	116
IX. A SERMON. A FAREWELL ...	134
X. AT LAST	157

CHAPTER		PAGE
XI.	"AH, WOE FOR YOUNG VIRGINIA, THE SWEETEST MAID IN ROME!" ...	168
XII.	A TRAGEDY OF ERRORS	177
XIII.	TO ENGLAND AND BACK	196
XIV.	MARY	210
XV.	WHAT THE CARNIVAL FIGURE MEANT	230
XVI.	RIGHT AFTER ALL!	243
XVII.	AFTER TWO YEARS	254





VIRGINIA.



CHAPTER I.

“WE LODGED IN A STREET TOGETHER.”

“My trade was with sticks and clay :
I thumbed, thrust, patted, and polished,
Then laughed, ‘They will see some day
Smith made, and Gibson demolished.’”


ROBERT BROWNING.

HER name was Virginia. She lived in my studio—had been born there, in fact—modelled in clay, and worked out in marble, for I was a sculptor, and she was my statue.

There was another Virginia, who lived

in a grim old palazzo across the road, exactly opposite my studio. This Virginia was a little girl with sunny hair, and laughing blue eyes. Both she and the palazzo belonged to the Salvini family, and as her father had been a count of that name, she was called *Contessina*. Her young brother was the head of the family now.

This little girl and I were great friends. We had always been so ever since the day when I, an awkward high-shouldered lad of fifteen, came stumbling into Rome, to seek my fortunes, and study sculpture under our one great English master ; and she—a mite, two years old, perhaps—toddled out on the balcony to witness my humble advent in the studio opposite her home. I nodded to her then, and we continued to nod to each other for many days after that.




I forget exactly how we became further acquainted. There was an English grandmother belonging to the family, and it was perhaps for her sake that I was made welcome at the Palazzo. Certainly, after her death, which, fortunately for me, did not occur till I had been some time in Rome, my visits to the Salvini family became fewer and further between.

I remember my first attempt at child-modelling was a little design of the *contessina* lying at full length on the grass, with one hand stretched out, and just closing over an imprisoned butterfly. My master praised the conception, and I certainly did not think the workmanship amiss. I even cherished a wild hope that some of the Salvinis might order the little figure in marble, or at least buy it as it was. But they did neither. I

kept it awhile, and worked it out, at last, in marble myself. A Manchester dealer saw it the other day, and wanted to buy it, and christen it the Infant Psyche. But it is not for sale now.

The Salvinis were very poor. I found that out by degrees. They lived in a big house, but they let the best part of it, winter by winter, to *forestieri*. They had been a mighty race in their day, following Godefroi de Bouillon to Ascalon, and pouring out their blood like water in any righteous or unrighteous cause. But they had dwindled down now to a boy, and a girl, and an invalid widowed mother. Even the rooms they did occupy in the Palazzo seemed too big for so small a party; but there was the English grandmother, who helped to fill them, and a clerical cousin as well—Padre Bernardo by



name. This latter, who was more feared than beloved by the children, was a grim gaunt man, with a dark haggard face, and wild eyes that flashed upon you suddenly, like unexpected flames from a burnt-down fire. He was director-in-general and special pope to the family; for it is a mistake to suppose that Roman Catholics are exempt from peculiar Protestant privileges of that sort. He had his own suite of apartments on the *entresol* of the Palazzo however; so his appearances in the family circle were chiefly of an accidental nature. I was glad of this, for, though always studiously polite towards me, I do not think the priest much appreciated the society of a sculptor.

I cannot quite remember when I first conceived the notion of making a statue

of Virginia—my Virginia, I mean,—Macauley's Virginia,—not little Virginia dei Salvini. It is possible the child's name may have suggested the idea. All day long, I used to hear them calling, "Virginia, Virginia!" up and down the stairs of the Palazzo (for she was a naughty child, I fancy, and spoilt by everybody); but that little mortal herself was still a tiny, toddling thing, when Lella Noti, the Sora girl, sat to me for a first study of my statue's head. And I had been thinking of it practically for two years before I began to work, and dreaming of it vaguely for as many more. Indeed, it seems to me, that ever since I have been conscious of living and working at all, Virginia has been the pulse of my existence—the one love of my life!

As for the child Virginia, I am afraid



her friendship for me was not quite spontaneous. I rather think, in fact, it was generated by the present of a doll. I remember the doll—a hideous object, with black goggle eyes, and a woolly head. I remember also the following conversation about it—

“Which do you like best, *bambinella mia*, the doll, or me?” I asked one day, coming upon her suddenly, and finding her lying on the grassy slope of the Pincian Hill, in the Infant Psyche attitude, only, instead of the butterfly, she was caressing with infinite, but unrequited, affection, the said hideous object of a doll, while Filoména, her nurse, gay in checked dress and ribbons and pins, sat stolidly knitting away under the shade of the terrace wall behind.

She looked up at me as I spoke, gave a

little kick, and answered, without the least hesitation—

“ Oh, the doll, of course ! ”

“ Why so ? ” I asked.

“ Because ” (also without the least hesitation) “ you see, the doll cannot love me at all, so I must love it twice over—once for itself, and once for myself ; but you *do* love me, you know, Dacko, so it does not so much matter about my loving *you*.”

She was barely five years old when she made this speech, and “ she already knows how women love,” thought I.

She heard the words as I muttered them to myself.

“ What’s a woman ? ” she asked, fixing her great blue eyes on mine, and keeping her legs still for once.

“ What’s a woman ? you silly ! ” cried

Gigi, the boy, springing down upon her, from the terrace above. “Why, what *la mamma* and Filoména are now, and what you will be some day, of course.”

“Shall I be a woman—really a woman?” she said, dreamily, as if half pleased, half frightened at the prospect opening out before her. And then she began to laugh again, and kicked out once more, and tried to see how nearly she could stroke the end of my nose with the tip of her little red shoe.

The children and I always talked in English together. They both spoke it perfectly, but the *contessina* did not like it. She did not like English people either, she said: which dislike was probably occasioned, partly by the little precise ways of her English grandmother, and partly by the over-bearing manners

of the English children, who from time to time, lived for a winter, or so, in the Palazzo Salvini. Gigi, who was five years older than his little sister, used to bully her greatly on this point.

"There goes your *sposo*," he would say aggravatingly, pointing to some fair-haired little lad trudging along by his nurse's side. "He will marry you, and carry you off to England."

"He shan't, he shan't! I won't marry him!" she would cry, reddening. "I would sooner marry Dacko, here." I was, no doubt, the least and the lowest of all her acquaintances, but I think she meant this speech as a sort of amends for her remark about the doll.

"But Dacko is an Englishman too," Gigi would observe with sly triumph.

"Dacko is *not* an Englishman," re-

“WE LODGED IN A STREET TOGETHER.” 11.


turned the child confidently. “Dacko has always been here—in Rome—always. You are not an Englishman” (clambering over my neck, and speaking a little doubtfully)—“are you, Dacko?”

I may as well say here that my name is Jack Travers, and that I *am* an Englishman. That little fact was, however, forgiven me on account of my having been “always in Rome”—namely, ever since the child could remember, and almost as long as she had been there herself.

There was another Englishman—or rather, English boy—who was, by-and-by, admitted to the friendship of the Salvini children. This was a handsome young fellow named West, with a beautiful dark-eyed Saint-Sebastian sort of face, but not gifted, I fear, with a temper to match.

He was the maddest, merriest lad I ever met, and the mere sound of his laugh was enough to make one laugh too, without needing to know the cause of it. He had plenty of talent also, though this, like his face, was not matched with a patient temper. He had come to Rome to study art, however, and was about the same age that I had been when I had arrived in the Eternal City for the same purpose. But that was seven years ago now, and I looked down from the heights of twenty-two, on this fifteen-year-old lad.

He, and Gigi, and the little *contessina*, soon became great friends, despite their differences in age, and many other differences besides. The Padre was absent at this time (he was frequently called away on sudden missions), or else, no doubt he would have interfered with this budding



friendship. The old grandmother was growing feeble and infirm, and less given to supervision than formerly; while as for the *contessa*, always sick and suffering, she was too much surprised to find that her children were provided with a proper amount of arms and legs, to think of curtailing their use of them in any way. So the *contessina* was left to wander about at her own sweet will, with her brother and her brother's friend.

It did not do her any harm, I think. Boys' society is a wholesome thing for girls, and if it sometimes makes them a little rough, it also makes them frank and free. I fancy these boys (Gigi was barely fourteen, and West was more like a schoolboy out for a lark, than a sober art-student) treated the child generally, as another boy, with brief intervals of

queenship and slavery. The *contessina* took it all as it came, being herself changeable in disposition, and given to crying passionately one moment for a thing she would laugh over the next. Perhaps she was somewhat of a tomboy in those days. But she had her moments of girlish sweetness and tenderness too.

She would always stop at home if her mother wanted her. She would sometimes wait at the bottom of a hill for poor old breathless Filoména. She would now and then—not very often, it must be confessed, and only, I fancy, when the teasing had become insupportable—run away from the boys to talk to me. I remember finding her one day crying her heart out on the Pincio. Her tormentors had tied her to a tree (close to the spot where, a few years before, I had seen

her lying in the Infant-Psyche attitude), and she was raging round and round it, like a little caged lioness, while they stood above on the parapet, laughing at her.

“Untie me!” she cried, imperiously, catching sight of me. “Quicker, quicker!”—as my fingers fumbled with the knots, and she twisted them tighter with her little impatient movements.

“You must stand still. You only strengthen the knots by struggling,” I said, quoting a modern poet.

“Do I really?” she asked, looking up at me with bewildered misty blue eyes. But, for all that, she could not stand still.

I managed to break the cord at last.

“Oh, thank you, thank you, Dacko!” she cried, flinging her arms round my neck. “How clever you are! I shall

stay with you now, and not go back to those horrid boys."

She did stay with me—about five minutes, and then ran away. Half an hour after, I saw "those horrid boys" carrying her home in triumph between them. They had crossed their hands, and made what children call "a sedan chair," and she was mounted upon it, with an arm thrown amicably round the neck of each bearer.

She was a small slip of a girl in those days, with a dark pale face, and not much promise of beauty, except in those strangely expressive blue eyes of hers. Gigi, whose proper name was Conte Liugi Francesco Cesare Salvini, was like his sister, but a size bigger, and a shade fairer all through. When the *contessina* was angry with him (and that was

not seldom, for she was a regular little vixen, as Filoména would with pride declare), she used to say he was no better than an Englishman. Gigi, however, did not care. He was of a quiet disposition, and a philosopher in his way. “There is good everywhere,” he would say; “but you will never find it out, *sorellina mia*, if you go on always being on fire like that. You will burn up everything, without ever knowing whether it may be good or bad.”

I think Frido West (the young fellow’s name was Wilfrid) remained about two years in Rome. He went away rather suddenly at the last, and there was some story about his having been recalled to England, because his father had just succeeded to a baronetcy. But I did not hear much about the matter, and nothing

whatever of the lad after he had left us. We were very good friends when we were together, but we did not care much about each other when we were apart. I was always rather a lonely fellow, and sculpture is certainly a less sociable art than painting. I dare say West thought me a fool for sticking so closely to my work, but I had my bread to earn, and no baronetcies were likely to drop from the sky for me.

Gigi was sent to college immediately after West's departure. Padre Bernardo, who had returned as suddenly as he had gone away, seemed to be shocked at the state affairs had got into during his absence. He soon set them to rights, however, or, at least, arranged them according to his own taste. But he neglected to provide a governess for the

contessina, who moped, and drooped, and looked very disconsolate, without her late gay companions.

“You must take me for a friend now, *carina mia*,” I said to her, one day, as I met her trudging along by Filoména’s side.

“So I would,” she replied quickly—“so I would, if only——” and then she flushed suddenly, and stopped short.

“If only, what?” I asked, wondering.

“If only you could ink your red hair, and push up the one shoulder that is lower than the other.”

From which may be inferred what manner of man I was! and by which may be excused some of the strange distorted views of people, and things in general, which life, at this stage of my story, presented to me.



CHAPTER II.

WAITING FOR HER STORY.

“I wish and I wish that the spring would go faster ;
Nor long summer bide so late ;
And I could grow like the foxglove and aster,
For some things are ill to wait.

“I wait for the day when dear hearts shall discover,
While dear hands are laid on my head,
The child is a woman, the books may close over,
For all the lessons are said.”

JEAN INGELow.

NOTWITHSTANDING the impossibility of my complying with her request in those two particulars, the *contessina* and I continued to be friends, and our friendship even grew in

a sort of way. I dare say we were an oddly matched pair, and I fancy the child's kindness to me was partly dictated by a sense of loneliness on her own part, and partly because she took a wicked pleasure in crossing the will of her clerical cousin. Fortunately, however, that important personage was still subject to sudden calls and lengthy absences from Rome. So we were left to prosecute our friendship pretty much as we liked.

Things change but slowly in Rome, or rather they did so in those days. The Sleeping Beauty still lay drowsy and dreamful on her proud Seven Hills; though the fairy prince who was to awaken her was nigh at hand in that year of grace, 1867. The Eternal City was still the greatest and the grimmest, the mightiest and the meanest, in the whole world.


But a new order of things was at hand, though its reign had not yet begun.

Not just yet, certainly, for still in those winters the same wild-looking *pifferari* came playing down from the Abruzzi with their bagpipes and sheepskins;—the same slouching students went streaming through the streets in their shabby cassocks and shovel hats;—the same flocks of *forestieri* swarmed in the churches, and presented themselves to the Holy Father;—the same number of art-students succeeded or failed, made a sudden splash, and swam straight away to the gleaming shores of success, or silently drifted on the tide of ill-fortune, and were drowned in the sea of oblivion. It seemed scarcely a year to me since young West went away; but I believe, in reality, it was about seven years.

There were just a few things that marked the flight of time, among the people in the Palazzo opposite. The old English grandmother was dead,—Gigi had left *il collégio*, and was now a distinguished member of the *Guardia Nobile*,—Padre Bernardo had received the purple stockings, and the title of Monsignore, as a reward for his many secret missions, people said,—while as for the *contessina*, her dusky head had long since towered over my red one. The poor *contessa*, alone, was unchanged. Always sick and suffering, and seldom able to leave her sofa, one felt that there could be but one change more in store for her.

The *contessina's* education had been of the most desultory order, but I do not think she was the worse for that. She

was naturally quick and intelligent, and had picked up knowledge, as a little bird picks up seeds. She could speak French, and English, as well as Italian ; and being a Roman, she had, at least, as good a smattering of history as many a boarding-school young lady. She had a strong feeling for art—most southern natures have that, it is their birthright—and she used to come twice a week, with old Filoména in attendance, to copy casts in my studio. She had learnt embroidery from the nuns at the Trinità, and dancing from the *maestra* of the ballet-girls at the Apollo Theatre. She could sing out of the fulness of her own gay young nature ; and that, I think, was the sum of her accomplishments. Monsignore Salvini had not thought it necessary to spend much money on a girl's education,



and, indeed, I do not think there was ever overmuch money in the Palazzo to spend upon anything.

I suppose she was pretty in those days, but I did not think much about that. She was slight, and tall, and womanly in some ways. But to me, she was still the child she had always been. Her face had not changed a bit. It was the same face still—the same small, pale, flowerlike face, with its cloud of dusky hair, and its blue eyes looking out wonderingly on a world that widened as she looked:—the same face still—eager, frank, uncertain, tremulous, ready to laugh, as ready to weep—in one word, to me, at least, infinitely sympathetic.

“It takes a long time to grow into a woman, doesn’t it, Dacko?” she said to me, one day when Filoména was scolding

her for having knocked down and broken the cast of an ear she had been copying.

"I wonder when I shall be one."

"When you have given up boxing my ears, *alias*, breaking my casts," I say, laughing, as I pick up my injured goods.

"Oh, Dacko, Dacko! I am so sorry—really sorry!" she said penitently, clasping her hands together in her childish way.

"But I ought to have grown into a woman long before this—oughtn't I? I am sure I am very slow about it. How does a girl become a woman? Do tell me, Dacko, please."

I paused in my work for a moment, and looked at her.

"Some by love, and some by pain, dear," I replied gravely, seeing she was bent upon having an answer. "And

some go floating smoothly across the narrow stream, and scarcely know when they have left this shore, nor when they reach the opposite one. I hope that may be your case, *carina*."

"I hope not," she returned shortly.

"Why?"

"Because I should like to know when I *have* become a woman; and I would rather bump against the opposite shore than not know when I had reached it. Only I hope," (with one of her merry rippling laughs) "that the bump will be made by love, and not by pain."

I looked at her again, and laughed too. I did not tell her that the words were nearly, if not altogether, synonymous. It seemed to me that *that* was a knowledge which would come soon enough, especially to a woman.

As for me, and my work, time, and the last few years, had dealt kindly with us both. Indeed, with the one exception of my great master's death, a loss which all Europe deplored, things had prospered with me beyond my wildest dreams. I was no genius, certainly, nor had I any superlative talent; but I had the habit of work, which I hold to be the next best thing to both. Power, inspiration, craft, used to come to me at regular times, and these were, of course, sacred hours to me. Perhaps some among my brother artists may regard this as a heresy, but it was true to me, at any rate.

I had completed one or two little things, which had found their way to Paris and London. They had been well received, and spoken of in both places. By degrees, I became known, and had

more orders than I could execute. A French princess sat to me, then an English duke, lastly an American statesman. I did not care for mere portrait work, however (no true artist ever does), and I longed for the days to come when I should be able to devote myself wholly, heart and hand, to such creations as my Virginia.

My Virginia!—how I loved to linger on the name! She was advancing towards completion now, and each day she seemed to grow in grace and beauty. I watched her as a mother watches her child, and probably looked at her with the same partial eyes. But I think the world would have confirmed my opinion of her, had it ever had the chance of doing so. Only, alas! that chance never came.

I had taken these lines as my subject:—

“Ah! how my darling loved me! How glad she was to hear

My footsteps on the threshold, when I came back last year!

And how she danced with pleasure to see my civic crown,

And took my sword, and hung it up, and brought me forth my gown;”—

and I had tried to translate them into marble, by representing the girl as throwing down her tablets, and starting up, with eager eyes, and tumbled hair, to meet her father. Her face was upturned and smiling, her eager hands were outstretched, her “small glancing feet” seemed, to me, absolutely to dance. I say to me, only, because I had never yet submitted her to any other gaze but my own. She was my secret, and I chose

to keep her to myself for a time. Even my workmen knew but little about her. I had set up a curtain at one end of my studio, and hidden her behind it, and I worked there myself in secrecy and solitude. It was foolish of me, no doubt—more than foolish, as I learnt later. But, at the time, I never thought of that.

I am wrong, however, in saying that no eyes but my own had as yet looked upon her. Long ago I had shown her to her namesake, the little girl from the Palazzo opposite. They had, in fact, grown up together, and I fancy, in those early days, the real Virginia used sometimes to confuse her own identity with that of the ideal one, as I did myself, too, perhaps, in later times. But she was also given to being very critical upon her, and as

her remarks were often correct, and always fearlessly given, I was generally the gainer by them. It is such an advantage to have a critic always at hand, who knows nothing, and feels everything.

“Was there really no way but this?” she said suddenly one day, leaning her elbows on my dusty tool-table, and turning over the leaves of the poem, that always lay open before me.

“No better way, I am afraid,” I answered, bending over my work, and feeling rather hot.

“There could be no worse one,” she said shortly. “Could there, now, Dacko?”

“Life is sometimes worse than death, dear,” I replied gravely, wishing the conversation were at an end, but aware

the wish was vain, for even from a child she would always "have her talk out."
"One can but die once, you know."

"That is not true," she returned quickly.
"One may die many times:—each time any one we love dies, we must die too, for a little while, I think. And it is not to the point either. Life, however poor, and miserable, and mean, must always be good, so long as there is love, or even the possibility of love, left in it. And there always is: whilst there is life, there is love. But death—that sort of death, at least—is such a cowardly thing, fit only for creatures who do not know how to live, nor how to love, nor how to die, either. I am glad I was not *that* Virginia."

"*You* do not mean to die for love, then?" I say, looking round at her with

a smile, and trying to turn the conversation into a more jocular strain.

But she flashed out upon me with grave scorn.

“No, certainly not; but I could live for it, I think, which, as you say, is sometimes harder, but must always be better, more useful, more worth doing, than dying for love. At least, so it seems to me.”

I think she was about sixteen, when she gave expression to these lofty sentiments. I think so, because I remember it was the spring then—she had some violets in her hand at the time;—and on an autumn day of the same year, she told me it was her seventeen-year-old birthday. She told me something else as well.

“Dacko,” she said, without the least

trace of her former fine feelings, "I am going to be a real woman now—I am going to be married. *Il cugino* has found a *sposo* for me. I saw him yesterday for the first time. He is such a dear, diminutive, little, old marquis, with a black wig, and no teeth. What do you think of that?"

"Think! Well, at least he will not be able to bite you," I growled, grinding my own teeth ferociously at the thought. And somehow, just at that moment, I felt inclined to wish that my Virginia could bite me.

The realities of life may be painful, and sharp, and bitter at times, as a north-east wind; but the world would be a far poorer place than it is, without them.




CHAPTER III.

SPERANZA.

“Lead, lead me on, my hopes ! I know that ye are true, and not vain. Vanish from my eyes, day after day, but arise in new forms. I will follow your holy deception, follow till ye have brought me to the feet of my Father in Heaven, where I shall find you all with folded wings, spangling the sapphire dusk whereon stands His throne.”—GEORGE MACDONALD.

AS I have said before, sculpture is not a sociable art, and I was naturally disinclined for society.

I was not good to look at—no one knew that better than I did myself,—nor was I much to talk to, for talking is like a steel



weapon, that requires to be kept bright by constant practice and polish. I could not walk, nor ride, nor dance, as others did. I could only work, and that I did with my heart and hand's whole strength.

I was a lonely fellow, therefore, living for the most part in a silent world, which I myself peopled ;—I was of a taciturn disposition ;—I was a *gobbo*, as I had once overheard Monsignore Salvini say, and had never forgiven him for saying ;—and yet I had my own best friends :—my friends, who talked to me, and taught me—who were always the same, gracious and soothing, whatever my mood might chance to be ;—my friends, who were the children of the great Fathers of Art, as my Virginia was the offspring of their enfeebled descendant, and who, being somewhat ill-provided with clothing, have

wisely chosen to remain, most of them, in this sunny clime of Italy. It was, in truth, their presence that made Rome so beloved a spot to me.

I was standing beside one of them one day. It was the greatest and grandest of them all, as I think,—the Mosé of Michael Angelo in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli. We had been talking together for some time ; or rather, *he* had been talking in that dumb language I understood so well—hurling down words of wisdom, like soundless thunder, breathing out “ sacred fire from the holy hill ; ” and I had been listening and learning. There was a sermon going on in another part of the church, and people kept passing in and out, and to and fro. Every now and then, lights were lifted, chants were raised, a file of cassocked

students went winding round the fluted columns like a long dark snake round the trees of a forest; a woman, with a baby at her breast, stretched out her hand, and begged feebly; an old man, with a grisly beard, rattled a tin pot, and glowered at me : but none of these things interrupted us, they were all in harmony, as it were, with Mosé's words, and with my thoughts.

By-and-by, however, there came up a group that seemed to be somehow out of tune with us all—with the kneeling people and praying priests, with the music and lights, with Mosé and me. This group consisted of a thick-throated middle-aged man, undoubtedly British; a beautiful fair-haired girl in a sweeping silk dress, with a long drooping feather in her dark hat; a regal-looking courier

loitering along behind; and an obsequious *custode* going on before.

“This way—this way, *eccellénza*,” said the latter, bustling along to a side chapel. “Yes, that is the statue, but the picture should be seen first.” Then he drew back a curtain, with a grating noise, and the rays of the setting sun fell full upon the upturned face and folded hands of Guido’s Speranza.

I could see it too from where I stood, and I looked at it again and again. I was never tired of gazing at this picture. It spoke to me as my friends the statues did, as few other pictures ever seemed to care to do. It always reminded me of my Virginia at home, and to-day the likeness seemed to be more palpable than ever. There was the same tender haunting smile, the same trusting steadfast

glance, in both. Only *my* child was younger, more bud-like, more really a child, than was Guido's Speranza. That was just as it should be, however. Hope may well be represented by one, who, having suffered, yet "endureth;"—but trust, perfect trust, which is quite another thing, can only be expressed by a child, who knowing nothing,—of necessity "believeth all things."

I was thinking this out vaguely, when suddenly my thoughts seemed to take shape, and stand beside me.

"Are you going home?" said this new Speranza, speaking. "If so, you may walk back with me and Filoména."

It was only the other Virginia, you see, who had been listening to the sermon, and who was profanely glad now it was over.

“Was it Monsignore who was preaching?” I ask, as we tramp home, side by side, through the narrow, dim, many-coloured streets.

“Ah, no!” she replied, with a little laugh. “*Il cugino* has gone away once more.”

“Why, he’s always away now!” say I, laughing too. “Not that I quarrel with him on that point; though I should like to know who this absent friend can be who enjoys his company so much.” Our mutual sentiments with regard to *monsignore* were no secret to each other.

“Perhaps he has gone to look out for another *sposo* for me,” says the *contessina*, with a quaint look.

“What! has *il marchese senza denti* refused your hand, then?” I ask, with a slight feeling of astonishment. It was

about a month after our last conversation.

“Ah!—did you not know? *è morto!*” she said, more gravely. “He died the week after we were betrothed—quite suddenly—of old age, I suppose. Do you think it was meant for an omen, Dacko?”

“I think it was meant as a sign that such marriages are unholy,” I reply, with some warmth. “But you do not seem to regret your loss very much, *cara mia.*”

“I only saw him twice, you see,” she returned apologetically. “And then, he was so very old—older even than you are, Dacko.”

“Do you regard me as a regular Methuselah, then?” I say, not over well pleased.

I suppose she did, for she was silent


for a moment ; then, with a smile rippling over her face, and running like the tinkle of water through her speech, she answered slowly—

“I regard you as my very best old friend. There—won’t that do?”

Do? I should think it would. It did for me to feed on for many a long day after that. And it was such wholesome food too.

“I see you have let your rooms,” I said, as we turned into the Via B——, from the corner of which we could see the Palazzo Salvini, with its first-floor windows blazing away like a row of gigantic diamonds. It was still early in the winter at this time.

“Yes, and to such very nice people,” she responded briskly; “though they *are* English, and horribly rich, of course.



But they are not half so objectionable as your countrypeople sometimes are, Dacko ; in fact, they are really most charming. Their name is Chilton. Mr. Chilton, and Miss Chilton—that is all. They were at San Pietro in Vincoli, this afternoon. Did you not observe them ? They were looking at the Speranza when you were standing beside the Mosé. Miss Chilton has a beautiful face. I am sure you would admire her. We have become great friends, and she has asked me to drive with her to the Villa Pamfili Doria to-morrow.”

We had reached the Palazzo by this time, and had bidden each other good-bye. I watched the *contessina* disappear under the archway, and then went back to my studio. I worked late that night—late, and long, and well. One always works

well when one is in good spirits, I think. And I was in very good spirits that night. I don't know why exactly. I was glad the *contessa's* rooms were let; I was glad the child over there had a friend; I was glad the *marchese senza denti* was dead; I was glad I was old; I was glad for everything, and everybody. I had never been so glad in all my life before, and there was my Virginia starting up behind her curtain, and smiling at me.

She was always so sympathetic !





CHAPTER IV.

A NEW FRIEND.

“There are none of England’s daughters who can show a prouder presence.”

MRS. BROWNING.



GOT to know the Chiltons soon after that.


They were good specimens of the genus millionaire—that is to say, the father was. Mary, his only child, was graceful, and gentle, and beautiful enough to be “the daughter of a hundred earls.”

Mr. Chilton was desirous of having a bust of his daughter executed in Rome.

He honoured me with an application. He was of a patriotic disposition, and liked to encourage British talent, he said. Besides, he had heard of my success with the Duke of B——.

But I refused at first. I was too busy. I had given up portrait-taking by this time, and had several *replicas* of my earlier works in hand. And then, there was always my Virginia, who, though beautiful in herself, was still far from perfect and complete, according to my original conception.


“Is it the price you are sticking at, sir?” said the millionaire, with his hands in his pockets. “There—take that, and fill it up yourself”—flinging a blank cheque down among my tools; “I do not think his grace could have done more—eh!”



My first inclination, of course, was to fling it back in his face, but I managed to smother that, and even to murmur some words of obligation, and a hope that Miss Chilton would shortly honour me with a sitting. I felt I had no right to be churlish. Artist, though I was, I was half a tradesman as well, selling my wares for what I could get; and here was a customer dealing with me in a princely manner.

I began my work unwillingly enough, but my surliness was soon charmed away by Miss Chilton's infinite sweetness and grace. She was one of those women who seem to be sent into the world expressly to drive the devil out of men. She spoke very little, but her face said a great deal. I fancied her father bullied her sometimes, though he idolized her

too. But she took it all, the double spoiling, and the world's homage as well, and was not spoilt. She had the softest eyes, the tenderest voice, the sweetest manner of any one I ever met; and yet, how I knew it I cannot tell, but I felt sure there was a brave spirit of resistance hidden somewhere behind that gentle, gracious way of hers. It might never yet have seen the light of day—it might never do so at all, perhaps. But there it was, all the same. There is no better barricade than a feather bed, but we do not draw such things up to our window-fronts except in time of siege. So it might be with Miss Chilton. Artists, you see, have a knack of delving under the soil, as they work upon the surface, and of speculating upon the sources of smiles and sighs.



Mr. Chilton naturally pleased me less than his daughter, but he was a good sort of man on the whole. He had a shiny head, and a pompous manner (the two always seem to go together), and he was a little given, at times, to being troubled with an uncomfortable sense of his own importance. But one soon got used to all that. He was also endowed with perfectly worthless opinions upon every subject, and lavished suggestions, as boundless as his wealth, upon me and my work. I submitted to them, however, as best I could. I felt that civility, and even servility, were included in that blank cheque.

“Wants life,” he would say, strutting up to the clay figure of his daughter, “spirit—expression—what do you call it? I say, Travers” (I think he would have liked

to have called me Jack, had it not been too great a condescension on his part towards a sculptor), "you ought to see your model, when she isn't your model. Suppose you come and drive with us this afternoon, and then you can study expression from the life. The little miss from over the way is coming too. We shall be a *party-carry*. Was not that what you said the other day, Mary?"

Miss Chilton blushed a little, and smiled. She was too true and tender-hearted to appear ashamed of her father, but I think his absurd remarks made her feel sorry sometimes.


We went to the Villa Ludovisi. It was a lovely day, windless and cloudless; the sky was as clear as a jewel, and the air as soft as velvet, and as sweet as violets. The girls, who had become inseparable

friends by this time, wandered about the sunny sloping garden, full of flowers and vegetables, jumbled together in happy confusion. They were just like a couple of flowers themselves, I thought:—Miss Chilton, tall and stately as a Madonna lily, with her crown of pale gold hair, and her graceful drooping head; while the *contessina* was like one of her own wild cyclamen, with her face so full of sudden lights and shades, and her quick, uncertain, swaying movements. I looked after them more than once, as I conducted Mr. Chilton through the *casino*, and pointed out to him the famous statue of the mighty, weary Mars, and the colossal head of the queen of the gods.

Mr. Chilton was a man of appreciation, or, at least, he thought himself so, which, in many cases, does as well. He was

graciously pleased to approve of some of my remarks, and even expressed a desire for more of them. "You must come again," he said cordially, as we wound our way home through the darkening streets, while the sun disappeared like a burnt-out flame, and the hills behind us dressed themselves up in shadows, pink and blue, and purple and grey. "We must see some more statues together. You are an excellent *lazzaroni*, Travers." He meant a cicerone, but it did as well.


I did go again. I had no idea before what a delicious picnic sort of place Rome is to her wealthy visitors. We were not always a *parti-carré*. The Chiltons had many friends, and were extremely sociable. It was a new sort of life for me, to find myself amicably pointing out the beauties of a landscape



to a travelling *troupe*, consisting of a father and mother, with a weak-eyed son, whose eye-glass resolutely refused to stick in his eye, and two strapping daughters, (weak brothers are usually blessed with lusty sisters), who giggled when they did not gape, and gaped when they did not giggle. Or, again, it was a novel sensation to hear my feeble voice disputing undiscoverable sites, with a burrowing antiquarian as dusty and cobwebby as a bottle of crusted port, or discussing "Free Love" with Mrs. Cato B. Tappen, the celebrated American champion of "women's rights," from whom I should have fled with horror a month ago. Then, besides these curiosities (Mr. Chilton had a taste for lions, and loved to hear them roar), there would be also a typical bride and bride-

groom, a spinster or two, a widow, or an unprotected female of some sort, and various stray young men, who are always willing to be swept into such nets as those held by the millionaire and his beautiful daughter. So that our *cortège* was sometimes quite formidable in point of numbers.

Sometimes, too, Conte Gigi would ride out on his big black charger, and join us as we loitered about among the ruins, or lunched under the shade of the ilex groves. It was easy to see that the young fellow was not a little smitten with the charms of Miss Chilton. That is to say, I saw it plainly enough. I do not know whether anybody else did. As for the girl herself, she treated her adorer with the most profound and insipid indifference.



“The young scamp!” I would say to myself, as I watched the pair. “He has an eye to the main chance, no doubt, but he has not bad taste either. Well, happy is the wooing that is not long a-doing! I do not fancy old Chilton would much object to having a count for his son-in-law.”

But my aspirations for my young friend’s welfare were in vain.

“Mary is engaged to be married,” said the *contessina* to me one day, as she threw herself down upon the grass by my side, and watched the retreating forms of Miss Chilton and her brother as they went strolling across the fields, accompanied by a selection of the Du Boulay Browns. I forgot to say before that the travelling *troupe* rejoiced in the euphonious double name of Du Boulay Brown.

"I have known all about it for some time," she went on, in a tone of importance. "But it was a secret till to-day, you know; now it can be so no longer, because *he* is going to arrive to-morrow."

"He—who?" I ask, with a smile.

"Mary's *fiancé*. His name is Sir Wilfrid Malpas. I seem to know the name somehow—don't you, Dacko?"

"I know the name of Wilfrid," I answer. "It was the name of that young West who was here some years ago. But I never heard the name of Malpas before, that I know of."

"Ah! Frido—that was it. Yes, Wilfrid West. I have been thinking about the name ever since I heard it. It seemed a quaint name, and yet familiar somehow. I wonder what has become of Frido, Dacko?"

"I haven't the least idea," I responded carelessly. "And so your friend is going to be married! Poor Gigi!"

"Yes—poor Gigi, and poor Monsignore, and poor mamma, too. They will all be so much disappointed when they know it. You see, *il cugino* had settled it all so nicely, and thought it promised well for everybody."

"What! does Monsignore cater for Gigi's love matters as well as for yours?" I ask, incredulously.


"He is always catering for the glory of the Church, and these things are included somehow," she replied, with a laugh.

The glorification of the Church was Monsignore's *môt d'ordre*.

"Then he has returned, *il cugino*?" I say, stupidly. "Has he been successful on your behalf, *carina*?"

“Eh! no; he is greatly disappointed at that, too,” she replied simply. “I overheard him say so to *la mamma* last night, and he added that we must not be particular any longer, but take any chance that comes; husbands are so hard to find now-a-days.”

There was something so quaint, so comic, so frank, in the utterly unconscious, unsentimental way, in which she discussed her matrimonial prospects, that I could not help laughing. She did not care, however. It seemed to her neither a laughing nor a crying matter, but simply another stage of existence into which she was passing, like a baby cutting its teeth, or a girl turning up her hair. Her sentimental phases were emotions, true whilst they lasted, but come and gone in a minute. Her ordi-



nary feeling was that of a child—eager for a story, and ready to be pleased with any that was put into her hand to read. She did not know yet that women sometimes make their own love-stories for themselves, and these, though often written awry, are far more amusing, and prettier, too, on the whole, than those made for them by somebody else. It is at a later period still that the actors of life yearn to become its authors and its artists too, and would fain paint themselves in the foregrounds of their own pictures, as the heroes and heroines of their own romances.





CHAPTER V.

AN OLD FRIEND.

“Of right good blood, and gracious ways, that had
All noble fashions to make people glad,
And a soft life of pleasurable days.
He was a goodly man, for one to praise,
Fearless and whole, from head to foot.”

St. Dorothy.

THE *contessina* attended mass every morning, at the convent church of the Trinità de Monti. She had done so ever since the day she left off trotting out on the balcony, to nod and kiss her hand to me. Now, in return, I used to open my studio door, and greet

her as she went by. I am afraid I did not often see her set out, but it was very seldom indeed that I missed her on her return.

On the morning after our talk about Gigi, I went down to my studio, and opened the door, and looked out as usual. But there was no *contessina* in sight yet. I left the door open, however. She was sure to be back soon.

It was a lovely morning, bright and beautiful as an English May day. A great burst of sunshine and light came blowing and breathing into my studio. I stood at the door, and basked in the delicious warmth.

Whilst I stood there, leaning lazily against the lintel, and looking out towards the piazza, a *carròzella* came clattering down the street, and drew up under the

archway of the Palazzo Salvini opposite. There was a young fellow inside, who stepped out briskly, and looked round him with a smiling air of recognition. Then the *carrózzella* drove away again with its modest load of luggage; and its late occupant, after looking at his watch, lighted a cigar, and stood in the archway enjoying it.

“This must be the *promesso sposo* in person,” say I to myself, eying the individual somewhat critically. “Well, he is good-looking enough, even to match Miss Chilton.”

He was indeed. I have seen plenty of handsome men in my day, but I have seldom seen a finer face, or better-proportioned figure than the one before me now. He did not look stupid either, which it is permitted to an ugly man to

remark is often the case with handsome ones. And as it is also the prerogative of ugly folks to have a perfect passion for beauty, I went on looking at him as he stood there in the sunshine, with the light falling on his beautiful, upturned face, and the breeze blowing back his dark-brown hair, while his eyes—brown too—went slowly glancing up and down the still, silent street.

How the thought came into my head I do not know—perhaps it was the Christian name that suggested it, or perhaps it was the general air of recognition about the young fellow himself—but somehow, as I looked at him, I began to think of Wilfrid West. Slowly too, and rather vaguely, I recalled the romantic story I had heard concerning his departure from Rome ; till, by the time I had

looked at him for five or six minutes consecutively, I had quite decided in my own mind that the beautiful youth opposite, whether he were Miss Chilton's *fiancé* or not, was no other than our old friend, Wilfrid West.

By this time, also, the *contessina* had come tripping down the street with her old nurse, Filoména, by her side. Poor Filoména! Time had dealt less kindly with her than with her young mistress. He had shed his frosts liberally upon her hair, and stiffened her old limbs with his icy breath. But as a parting between her and the *contessina* would have broken both their hearts, she had been suffered to exchange her nurse's pins and ribbons for a *cameriera's* stout stuff dress, and thus hobbled about behind her young lady, as rather an inefficient chaperone.

The *contessina* herself wore a long dark cloak, which nearly reached down to the ground, and made her look taller and slighter than ever. She had drawn the hood of her cloak over her head; and, as she came marching along, with her face thrown back, and a light in her eyes, left there by her prayers, she looked not unlike some boy-grenadier, prepared to do battle for right. She just glanced round for a second to nod to me, as her way was, when suddenly she caught sight of the young man standing in the archway. Whereupon she forgot me, and ran across the road, with her hand stretched out.

“Why—why—you are,” she stammered, and then stopped short. She had recognized him at once (a woman’s instinct is always so much quicker than a man’s), but she did not quite know how

to address him. In the old days she had always called him, as Gigi had called him, simply West. But she felt that would not do now.

"I am Sir Wilfrid Malpas," said the young fellow taking off his hat, and looking at her as much as to say, who are you?

"Snob!" I mentally ejaculated. But the *contessina* only said, "*Scusi*," and ran away.

I suppose Sir Wilfrid Malpas, at that moment, either suddenly lost his senses, or suddenly recovered them. He looked round blankly for a second, and then with a quick laugh he ran away too, after the *contessina*. I suppose he caught her up on the stairs, and that a recognition took place there; but, although I could see a good deal from my studio door, I could not see down the passage, nor, indeed,

anything beyond the archway, except the shadow. I only know that the young fellow came back after a minute, smiling pleasantly, and pulling his moustache in a contented manner; and that I had to do without my nod from the *contessina* all that day.

I don't think I have ever said so before, but I really was very much attached to my *appartamento* opposite the Palazzo Salvini. It was humble, but it was compact, and it had been my home ever since my arrival in Rome. There was my studio on the ground-floor, and my own private rooms *al secondo*. A German artist and his wife occupied the *mezzanine* floor; and a *cantatrice*, who gave lessons by day, and sang at the Teatro Apollo by night, was supposed to live on the uppermost story. We were quite a happy

family, and willing to do each other any good turn in our power, but I do not think we were otherwise very sociably inclined.

The one disadvantage of the house, which was called Palazzetto Salvini, was that it had been decidedly (whether intentionally, or not, I do not know) built for conversational purposes with its grander and more important *vis-à-vis*. We could not quite shake hands out of opposite windows, as I have heard can be done in some of the streets in Florence, but the said windows were well within shouting—I had almost written, whispering—distance of each other. In the old days, the *contessina* and I used often to carry on duets after this fashion; but, of late, we had mutually abstained from such vocal performances. Indeed, I generally

.

kept my doors and windows shut now, though the *contessa*, who suffered from fits of breathlessness, was still forced to keep hers wide open.

Sir Wilfrid Malpas came to see me in the course of the day. He had so few friends left in Rome, he said ; which was, I suppose, a flattering way of accounting for his early visit to me. He was very cordial and pleasant, and laughed and talked, in quite his old, boyish way.

“And you have grown such a great man too, old fellow,” he said, laughing. “I heard of you often in London : became quite an important character, one day, by saying, I had known some one who had known you.”

“I have not become such a great man as you have,” I growled. I don’t know why, but I felt somehow inclined to be

rather on the defensive with my visitor. It was not his fault, I am sure. He looked too handsome and happy not to be kindly disposed towards everybody. But the mere presence of some people acts upon others as the sight of a dog does upon a cat. And *gobbi*, as I reflected rather bitterly, have, no doubt, a natural tendency towards setting up their backs.

“Oh! but your success is merit, mine is luck,” he said, good-temperedly, not even taking a big dog’s notice of my snarl. And then he went on to tell me how his father had discovered his right to a disputed baronetcy, and how, by a change of name, they had proved their claim to it, at last. The trial, which had been a protracted one, had cost them almost the whole of their fortune, however; and the old man had died, half in triumph,

half in vexation, at having secured such an unsubstantial honour. "So that on the whole," he added, with one of his old, merry, ringing laughs, "I don't know that I am much more of a man now, than I was when I was here, seven years ago, with all my life before me, and heaps of artistic honours lying at my feet, only waiting to be picked up!"

There was no resisting the young fellow's gay good-humour, and happy, handsome face. I laughed too, and we talked of old times. But he never once alluded to Miss Chilton. Could it be possible that I was mistaken? Was this not her *fiancé*, after all?

"I thought there were honours of another sort in store for you, now?" I say, meaningly, after a pause.

"Oh, you mean my engagement," he

said quickly. "Have you seen Miss Chilton, Travers? Is she not beautiful?"

"Very," I returned enthusiastically. But my enthusiasm was evidently not of the catching order, for he continued, quite calmly—

"And she is as good as she is beautiful, and twice as rich as she is either!"

"You mercenary wretch!" I cried indignantly. "You do not deserve your luck."

"Very likely not," he responded coolly. "Luck, as I observed just now, is quite independent of merit. And I am modest enough to think that it *was* luck, and not merit, that won me so beautiful a bride as Miss Chilton."

"I should have substituted another word for luck," I said drily. "But no doubt you know best."

“Ah, you are disappointed—you sentimental old chap!” he cried, throwing back his head, and looking at me, and laughing. “You were on the look-out for raptures, ecstasies, and all that sort of thing from a real live lover—eh? Too much trouble, old boy; besides, it’s not the fashion now-a-days. Cold as marble, stiff as clay—that’s the sort of thing; and there’s a beautiful figure of speech for a sculptor! But I say, *amico*, are you not going to show me some of these things that have made the world stare? Why, I have travelled all the way to Rome expressly to see them!”

I laugh, feebly flattered.

“Don’t be so absurd,” I make answer, as I pull some of the cloths off my clay figures. “What would Miss Chilton say if she overheard you?”

“How you do keep harping on that subject!” he cried, reddening furiously. “Are you in love with Miss Chilton yourself?”

“No,” I replied emphatically. And it was impossible to doubt my word.

“Do you know what it is to be in love with anybody?”

“No,” I reply again.

“Then don’t bother a fellow who does,” he returned shortly.

I felt completely shut up. A small pause ensued.

“I say, old fellow,” he began again good-humouredly—(I don’t think he could ever have been angry with any one for more than two minutes together, and, as he was usually the first to offer the branch of peace, he must have already used up a good many olive-trees in the course of

his brief life)—“don’t let us fight the first moment we meet after so long a parting,” he said, with a smile of comic sentimentality. “The little girl over there welcomed me much more warmly—the other little girl, I mean: not Miss Chilton, of course. She nearly cried with delight when we recognized each other in the passage this morning, and I believe I could have got a kiss for nothing.”

“I *don’t* believe it,” I returned, growing cantankerous again. “It’s only your absurd vanity makes you think so. London has spoilt you, Sir Wilfrid Malpas.”

“Don’t call me that, old fellow,” he cried, holding out to me another leaf of his olive-branch. “Call me Malpas, or Frido, or whatever you like—but not by that absurd name.”

“All right, thank you,” I returned, accepting the leaf. “And what did you think of the *contessina*, Malpas? Do you think she has grown up pretty?”

“Pretty! Now, all the saints in Rome forbid! It was rather dark in the passage, certainly, especially after coming in suddenly out of the light; but, as far as I could see, she seemed to me to have a figure like a lamp-post, and a face like a peeled potato. But then, who could look pretty beside my Mary? Miss Chilton has spoilt me for beauty, if you like, Travers.”

No doubt, no doubt;—I thoroughly agreed with him; and yet I was puzzled too. This was genuine admiration, if it were nothing else; and yet, only a moment ago, he had spoken so differently, so oddly, I thought. Or was it that I

did not understand him—I, who knew nothing of the ways of society, nor of lovers either, for that matter? But I *did* know that if ever I happened to be in love, as he suggested just now, it must be after another fashion than this. Nor would she whom I loved, I fancy, submit to be wooed quite so tamely as Malpas seemed to have wooed and won Miss Chilton. And then I laughed at the idea of my having a lady-love at all, and discovered that I had only been thinking of that ridiculous, impetuous, little *contessina* over the way, all the time—of some like her, I mean, of course.

“You are a great man—a great man, Travers,” said Malpas, as he bade me good-bye, after a leisurely inspection of all my works. “I am not sure I do not envy you, after all.”

And yet I had not shown him my
Virginia!

Lovers certainly are an unaccountable
race.





CHAPTER VI.

EAVES-DROPPING.

“So happy, so happy, and this being so,
I ask not, I care not, the reason to know.”

AFTER Sir Wilfrid Malpas's arrival, I joined Mr. Chilton's picnic parties less frequently than I had done before. I thought the future son-in-law could do the *lazzaroni* business as well as I could, and I really wanted to get on with my work. Miss Chilton was to be married in Easter week, and her bust must, of course, be nearly com-

pleted by that time—at least, as far as portraiture went. I engaged a new workman, Gaetano by name, a clever fellow, but taciturn as a Scotchman, and not particularly popular among his comrades. He did his work well enough, however, which was all that concerned me.

Spring is always lovely in Rome, but this year's young daughter seemed to surpass in sweetness those of her sisters who had come and gone before. Day after day, the picnic people went streaming out of Rome, laughing, and packing themselves into wondrously elastic carriages; and came back at dusk, laughing still, and laden with flowers. I was rather sorry for Miss Chilton. It must have been tiresome, I thought, to be always in the midst of such a "madding crowd." I was not sorry for Malpas—

he seemed to be capable of enjoying himself under any circumstances ; nor for the *contessina*, who was so evidently and indisputably happy, it was a pleasure merely to look at her.

I suppose the Chiltons thought so too, for they never went anywhere without her. Her laugh was gayer, her face was brighter, than all the others put together. Notwithstanding Sir Wilfrid's ridiculous remarks, I declare she was growing quite pretty too ; and I think young Du Boulay Brown, who was usually of the party, was of my opinion also. There is no cosmetic like happiness, all the world over.

“ Well, *cara mia*, you have had a pleasant time lately, have you not ? ” I said to her one bright morning, as she came tripping back from mass as usual.

She ran across the road to speak to me. I must premise that my nods and morning greetings had become rather spasmodic of late; the child being generally in a hurry to get home and learn the day's arrangements. This morning, however, she seemed to have a little time to spare.

“Oh, Dacko, Dacko—*yes!*” she cried, putting her hand into mine, and looking full at me with her frank blue eyes, that seemed to be absolutely dancing with delight. “It is all so enchanting, so delightful, and it seems to get more and more so every day. Do you know, Dacko” (in a lower voice), “I think you were wrong about girls only becoming women through love, or through pain? I think I am going to grow into one through happiness.”

"You are not one, yet," thought I, as I held her hand in mine, and looked at her again and again. Nevertheless, heigh-ho ! for Du Boulay Brown !

"Why don't you speak?" she said, impatiently. "Don't you think I am right?"

"I hope so," I replied, still looking at her.

"I am sure of it," she returned confidently. "It may not be exactly through my own personal happiness perhaps, but through somebody else's, you know. And seeing other people happy is almost as good as being happy one's self, isn't it, Dacko?"


"Better," I say, more to myself than to her. And then, I added aloud, "But what will you do when Lent comes, little one? Your delightful picnics will end then, will they not?"

"You tiresome Dacko, to remind me of such tiresome things," she cried, drawing her hand away. "But all the same, Lent will not matter much. *Il cugino* has promised to get me a dispensation, if he can, and I should think he would be able to manage that."

"And then, I suppose, you will manage to love *il cugino*?" I returned, with a touch of that uncertain temper common to men of my condition.

"I shall love him better than I love you, when you talk of such disagreeable things," she retorted, tossing her words over her shoulder, like Parthian arrows, as she ran away. "And see, there he is, tapping at the window for me! Perhaps he has got the dispensation already. *Addio, Dacko.*"

I had not spoken without reason.



Lent was close at hand by this time, and the Carnival was already in progress. Mr. Chilton had hired a balcony in the Corso, which he daily filled with gay laughing faces, like flowers, while darker, more stalwart, forms were dispersed here and there among them, as, it might be, the sticks round which the flowers were to be twined. He had invited me to join his party also, but hitherto I had not availed myself of his kind invitation.

Miss Chilton gently reminded me of this, during a sitting she gave me, that morning.

“I have been hoping so much you would come, Mr. Travers,” she said, in her soft, pretty, sing-song voice. “I want you to tell me the meaning of some of the dresses and characters; and,

you know, papa is always delighted to see you."

I bowed my thanks, and promised to present myself at Mr. Chilton's balcony, in the Corso, on Shrove Tuesday. "The dresses and masks will be most numerous on that day," I said. "But, surely, Sir Wilfrid, or your friend in the Palazzo opposite, could explain any thing you wished to know."

"Ah! so they could—and I never thought of asking them," she said, with a smile. "How very stupid of me!" But I thought her smile had more sadness than stupidity in it.

Miss Chilton's face was a difficult one to express in marble. It was one of those pure, pale, serene faces that are only saved from being almost expressionless, by a rare smile of infinite sweetness

and tenderness. I had been trying to catch that smile for weeks, and had just succeeded in doing so, as I thought, when here it was to-day, only half expressed after all—for another, and a sadder, tone of feeling seemed to have been added to it since I had seen it last.

“I am afraid I am tiring you,” I said, hoping that the sigh which breathed through the smile, might be only my fancy, after all. But she shook her head, and smiled again.


“I am not at all tired, thank you,” she said (her voice had always a tune in it—a pretty, pleasant, chiming sort of tune generally; but to-day, like the smile, it seemed to have grown into a sad one); “and I think I must ask you kindly to let me stay here a little longer. Sir Wilfrid promised to meet me at your

*studio, as we had settled to take a little walk together before going for our drive. He is after his time, but I hope I am not wasting yours."

"Oh no, indeed!" I replied quickly. "And I shall be so glad to have Sir Wilfrid's opinion of your bust. It was a happy thought, your meeting here."

I went on working, and she grew silent again. Generally, she was a very queen of sitters, falling naturally into position, and remaining so, almost immovably, the whole time. But to-day she was restless. She looked at her watch several times, and listened evidently to every sound and stir in the street outside. But still no Malpas appeared.

"I must really go now," she said at last, rising. "We are going to drive to



the Fountain of Egeria this afternoon, and the carriage will be here immediately. Frigett, give me my things."

And Frigett, Miss Chilton's prim-faced waiting-maid, and sworn adversary of Filoména, whom she designated as "a person with no sense of her position," obeyed grimly.

As the last wrap was being fastened, Malpas burst in hurriedly, and laughing.

"Forgive me, my queen!" he said, bowing and bending over Miss Chilton's gloved hand. "I overslept myself this morning in dreaming of you. I am heart-broken, *desolé*, *sconsolato*, as they say here, to think that we shall not now have time for our stroll on the Pincio; but I may, at least, have one look at the bust, may I not? Travers is most chary of exhibiting his works, as you have no

doubt discovered. But if *you* command, he must obey."

I pulled the damp cloths off my clay model, as he spoke, and I told Gaetano to wheel the figure slowly round. Malpas stood where he was, in the doorway, and cried out, "Good!—very good!—excellent!" with each change of position, and light, and shade; but, somehow, I felt he was not thinking much about it, after all.

"What do you say to the mouth?" I asked anxiously. "I find Miss Chilton's——"

"Couldn't be better, old fellow; the pose of the head is admirable," returned Miss Chilton's lover, not even looking at the bust, nor at his lady-love either, but letting his eyes stray slowly round the studio. "Hallo! what's this?"

He had moved, as he spoke, and was

pulling back the curtain at the far end of the room. *This* was my Virginia, of course, who had been hidden behind it hitherto in sacred silence and secrecy, but was now revealed for the first time to the light of day, and the gaze of three pair of eyes.

“Why, it is—surely it is—the *contessina*!” he said slowly. And then he stood still, and stared at *that*.

“It’s no such thing,” I cried angrily. Of all ridiculous things in the world for any one to say, that my ideal Virginia had been taken from, or had been even suggested by, the real one, seemed to me about the most insulting and absurd. “Lella Noti, the Sora girl, sat for it, when the *contessina* was about five years old. You might have remembered it in the old times, Malpas, had you been blessed with any memory at all.”

He looked at me incredulously ; then back at the statue.


“ I do not remember it,” he said. “ I don’t believe I ever saw it before.”

“ I think the carriage is at the door, Wilfrid,” said Miss Chilton gently. “ Papa will not like to be kept waiting. Had we not better wish Mr. Travers good-bye ? ”

The carriage *was* at the door. I had heard it drive up a minute ago. Two people were already seated in it.

“ We are going to the Grotto of Egeria, Dacko,” cried one of the two, shrilly, as Malpas helped Miss Chilton in.

“ Yes, we are going to the Grotto of Egeria,” echoed Mr. Chilton pompously. “ Will you not come with us ? ”—offering me, I suppose, the courier’s seat, for there was certainly no other available.



I declined the honour, however, and, retreating to my studio, set to work once more on Miss Chilton's mouth. Poor pretty lips! I hope they were laughing now: they had been sad enough when they were here an hour ago. What a ruffian Malpas was to keep her waiting like that, and then disappoint her of her walk after all. He was not worthy of her, that was clear, though she, poor girl, could hardly be expected to see that. Not that she was blind at all. On the contrary, I think, she saw wonderfully plainly for one in her condition. But some women can live upon the smallest scraps of another's love, and even look sleek and happy upon them. Is it because their own love is so full and deep, and overflowing that it amply suffices for themselves, and for more than themselves too, sometimes?

It was a moist, warm day, and my studio was rather hot for working in clay. I never thought it necessary to keep my door shut when the *contessina* was out, so I left it open now, and the windows too. Just occasionally, in the breathing spaces between my work, when I leant back and yawned, I could hear the sound of Monsignore Salvini's harsh, rough voice, grating and grinding away like a coffee-mill, as he discoursed with some one in the Palazzo opposite—probably to the poor *contessa*. But my men were busy, chipping and chiselling round me, and the street was full of carriages rolling backwards and forwards, so I only caught the sound, and not the sense, of his speech.

By-and-by, however, when the working hours were over, and the carriages had rolled themselves and their gay freight

up to the Pincio, and the street was very quiet, and the studio door still open, I distinctly heard Monsignore say—

“There is no other chance, *contessa*; I have made inquiries everywhere. You see, Virginia has no *dot*, and not much beauty to speak of. She must either marry this Englishman, or make up her mind to *coiffer Sainte Cathérine*.”

I had got up to shut the door, as my way was whenever I could distinguish words, but the name of the *contessina* arrested my steps. They were evidently discussing her prospects of marriage with young Du Boulay Brown, and, though my soul burned within me, I could not help listening. I was not rewarded for my pains, however. There was an inaudible murmur from the *contessa*. Then Monsignore spoke again—my own name.

“ Travers !—that miserable *gobbo* ! ”

I shut to the door with a bang. I did not in the least care to hear what Monsignore Salvini had to say about me.

I went back to my studio, and drew the curtain, and looked at my fair Virginia. The light of the swinging lamp in the street outside flickered and fell upon her as she rose up before me, with eager eyes, and outstretched hands, and small glancing feet. She seemed to move ; she seemed to breathe ; she was absolutely alive, speaking, smiling ; and there was—yes, there was—a little look of the *contessina* somewhere about her, after all. *Bah* ! how could I be so foolish ? It was only my fancy, of course. I let down the curtain with a rush ; I put away my tools noisily, and thought of — Du Boulay Brown.

It was quite dark before my work was done, and the moon had come out with a solemn burst, and was sailing away serenely through the sapphire sky, and sending great silvery waves of light into my dingy room. How late those Egeria people were ! They ought to be back by this time. I went to my studio door once more. The conversation in the Palazzo opposite must surely be over now. It had begun an hour or more ago. But no,—it was going on still.

“The obstacle *must* be removed,” I heard Monsignore say in his harsh, grating voice. “We will try her first, with the help of the Church, and her own feelings ;—and if that fail, then the State——”

I think he said something else, but I did not hear what it was. A carriage

was rattling down the street; a young girl's voice was talking gaily.

“ Oh, there's Dacko at his studio door, looking at the moon,” said the voice, with a laugh. “ *Felice notte, amico*—we have had such a happy day.”

Lucky Mr. Du Boulay Brown!





CHAPTER VII.

A SKELETON AT THE FEAST.

“ In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets.

* * * * *

But soft, behold ! lo, where it comes again.”

Hamlet.

SHROVE Tuesday had come. I did not feel very much inclined to join Mr. Chilton's party in the Corso. Nevertheless, having promised, I went.

Mine host received me with effusion.

“Come in, Travers, come in. There’s plenty of room, though there is not much to see. Silly lot, these modern *Rum’uns*. What would Romulus, and Remus, and Rienzi say, if they could rise out of their graves and see their degenerate descendants making fools of themselves up and down the streets.” He spoke as if Rienzi were a sort of Cinderella-brother to the other two, and he had visited their joint places of sepulture yesterday.

Notwithstanding Mr. Chilton’s assertion, however, the balcony was quite full, and the room nearly so. All our old friends of the picnic parties were there—the Du Boulay Browns in full force, Mrs. Cato B. Tappen, the inevitable bride and bridegroom, etc. I found a quiet corner behind a window, and within the shade

of Mrs. Tappen's ample form, from whence I peeped down at the kaleidoscope scene below.

The *contessina* was in front, somewhere in the vicinity of young Du Boulay Brown. She did not appear to be much occupied by him though, nor indeed by any one or anything except the Carnival itself. I could not see her face, but I could hear her laugh ringing out now and then, and that was enough to tell me how joyous and jocund she was.

"Oh! are you there; Mr. Travers?" said Miss Chilton, looking round, and seeing me. "Do come out here. We can make room, I am sure."

Everybody drew back to let Miss Chilton's favoured guest pass. Even Sir Wilfrid Malpas made way for me by his lady-love's side, and squeezed himself up

closer to the *contessina*. He had been standing between them hitherto.

"You ought to be highly flattered, Travers," he said. "Miss Chilton has been asking for you all the afternoon, and will not be satisfied with any of the explanations I have given her."

"How can you be so absurd, Wilfrid," said Miss Chilton, looking, I fancied, just the least bit in the world annoyed. And then we all talked together a little about the quaint characters and the motley crowd.

Meanwhile the conversation at the other end of the balcony went on vigorously, and came drifting towards us in little gusts, mingled with scraps of *confetti*, and fag ends of flowers, and *bonbonnières*.

"I wish the Pope would go by just

now," sighed Miss Ada, the youngest and giddiest of the Du Boulay Brown's family, with a killing glance at a long-legged Oxonian beside her, who was so tall you could not look at him all at once, but had to take him in sections as it were. "It would be such fun to pelt the old gentleman with *confetti*."

"The old baby, you mean," retorted Miss Constance, who had an objection to Popery, and liked to air it—religion being a woman's battle-field, as politics is a man's. "He always looks just as if he were done up in swaddling clothes."

"Well, he is in his second childhood, so it's all right," said the huge Oxonian, trying to be gigantically funny, but not succeeding particularly well. He might, however, have been about to add something better, when Miss Ada interrupted him—

“Oh, oh! do look! There’s that dreadful figure again.” And she gave a little tittering scream, as if she were not quite sure whether courage or timidity would have most effect on her great admirer.

We all looked, however, and neglected to satisfy her mind on this point. The Corso was comparatively quiet and empty just now:—but down below, exactly in front of Mr. Chilton’s balcony, a ghastly-looking figure, shrouded in black from head to foot, was standing motionless. The dress was that of the Sacconi Neri—a peaked hood drawn over the face, with two narrow slits in front, through which the eyes glared grimly, and a long, full cassock completely concealing the person, and giving the figure an appearance of unnatural height. This

dress is often seen in Rome during Lent, being frequently assumed by young men of good family, as a sort of penance, during that season. But its appearance in the midst of the Corso, at Carnival time, was certainly startling and strange.

"Has that figure been here before?" I asked of Miss Chilton.

"Yes, several times I believe, though I have only seen it once before."

"Oh, you think it's an 'it,' then, do you?" I say, with a smile.

"I don't know what it is," she replied, half smiling too; "but I wish it would go away. The last time I saw it, it stood like that, motionless for a moment, and then glided off. But, see now!—it seems to want something. It is beckoning to us."


So it was. The figure which had

hitherto stood as still as a statue, now began waving its arm (I follow Miss Chilton's phraseology) slowly and steadily, backwards and forwards. The hand was covered with a black glove, but the fingers made the motion of beckoning.

"It must be a beggar," said young Du Boulay Brown sagaciously, setting up his refractory eyeglass. "Let us fling him something."

"One ought to have some hot coppers for him," said the elephantinely witty Oxonian. "I remember one day at Oxford——" And then he began relating to Miss Ada sundry humorous feats of his own in that line, to which she lent a tittering attention; while Augustus, her brother, produced some minute coins, and flung them down into the street.

They fell with a ringing, rattling sound



against the stones, and remained there, among some remnants of crushed *bonbonnières*, and trodden-down flowers, and *confetti*. And the figure remained there too, mute and motionless, scanning the balcony with its ghastly eyes, and waving its black arm incessantly backwards and forwards.

“He doesn’t seem to jump at your offering, old fellow,” said the Oxonian, breaking off in the midst of his lengthy, funny reminiscences to make this remark.

And the pious Miss Constance said, in a tone of serious annoyance—

“I wish you would not give money to such people, Augustus.”

“What *can* he want?” said the *con-tessina*, not using the pronoun “it,” but speaking in a half-plaintive, half-frightened tone. And then, for the first time,


I caught sight of her face, and saw it was as white as my Virginia's at home.

"He wants *scudi*, I should say," returned Malpas, flinging down a more munificent gift than that of "the young Augustus," who certainly was not quite worthy of his namesake. "He is evidently a beggar of elevated tastes, and disdains copper."

But if this view of the matter were correct, gold must have been the object of the creature's desires, for the silver *scudi* shared the same fate as the copper coins.

"I think it is *you* he wants, Contessina Salvini," said Miss Ada, airily. "You see, he has almost turned his back upon us, and is beckoning exclusively to you."

This was not quite true. The figure certainly took very little notice of the



fascinating Miss Ada, and was beckoning chiefly towards that end of the balcony at which the *contessina* stood. But his attention might, with equal justice, be appropriated by Miss Chilton, or myself, or Sir Wilfrid, or the *contessina*, as we were all standing in a row, in that order. Indeed, of the two, or rather of the four, I should say they were chiefly directed either to Miss Chilton, or to me. Miss Chilton, however, did not perceive this.

“Do throw him something, Virginia,” she said, dropping the indefinite pronoun. “Perhaps then he will go away. He is certainly waving his hand to you. He may be a relation of yours, you know, or some admirer who has chosen to get himself up in that horrible sort of disguise.”

“He is more likely a relation of the Old Gentleman’s,” growled Malpas, who

seemed to take queer pleasure in contradicting Miss Chilton's remarks to-day.

"Do you mean of the Pope's?" asked Miss Ada innocently. Whereupon everybody laughed, except me.

I was angry, and thought the remarks of the Du Boulay Browns in atrociously bad taste. They were in Rome, and if they did not do exactly as the Romans did, they might at least have remembered that there were Roman Catholics all round them. I left Miss Chilton's side, and made my way up behind the *contessina*. She should know that she had one friend, at least, among the party.

"What does it mean?" she said, suddenly stretching out her hand, but still staring down into the street.

I caught her hand in mine, and pressed it reassuringly. She looked round as I

did so. There was a strange wild light in her white face, such as I had never seen there before, nor in any other woman's either, for that matter. Then she snatched her hand away.

"Oh! it's you," she said, in a tone of disappointed surprise, as if she expected me to be somebody else. And she looked away again.

"It means nothing, *carina*," I said soothingly, in reply to her first remark. I was puzzled by her manner, and felt she must be really frightened. "It is only some very feeble joke on the part of some very feeble person."

"It's an infernally bad one," muttered Malpas, looking first at the *contessina*, and then at me. "Can't you get rid of the fellow somehow, Travers?"

I pushed my head forward over the

contessina's shoulder, and I could not help observing, as I did so, that the figure was certainly waving its hand at her *this* time, and doing it very frantically too.

“*Va via, va via!*” I shouted at the top of my voice, and all the others joined in the cry.

The figure moved a little. We could almost fancy we heard its bones crackling and creaking, as it did so. The street was beginning to get dark by this time, and it was still quiet and empty just here, for the *Moccoletti* people were preparing for their torchlight race in a distant part of the Corso. The figure lowered its arm, then lifted it again, drew off its hood slowly—very slowly—and disclosed—a skull!

We were all silent for a moment.

“What is it?” gasped Miss Ada, as the



figure once more replaced its hood, and glided away down one of the side streets.

“It is a figure of Death!” replied the *contessina* steadily. “I knew it was so all the time. Such things have been seen here before.”






CHAPTER VIII.

A PASTORAL VISIT.

“The skies in the darkness stoop nearer and nearer ;
A cluster of stars hangs like fruit in the tree ;
The fall of the waters comes sweeter, comes clearer :
To what art thou listening and what dost thou see ?”

JEAN INGELow.

SHE was never the same after that day—after that moment, I might almost say. The rest of the party, who had been scared too, forgot their fears in the fun of the *moccoletti*; but I could see the *contessina*'s white, frightened face, flashing through the



sudden light and dark, and her pale lips trembling as she blew out the torches.

She was never the same to me. I think she tried to be so, but she failed. She never came, and asked me, "What was it, Dacko?" as she would have done a week ago. She never once alluded to the matter in any of our subsequent conversations.

I was glad of this in one way, for I certainly could not have answered her. I could not even answer myself. I puzzled over the matter a good deal, but failing to make anything out of it, I put it down ultimately to the Italian love of intrigue and mystery, which still finds its vent in priestcraft, and a taste for the supernatural.

Meanwhile Monsignore's dispensation must have come in usefully. The picnic

parties went on as usual, and the *contessina* went with them. She used to look wildly happy sometimes, when they started; but she often appeared drooping and tired, when they returned. Her face seemed to be changing somehow. The old frank smile in her eyes had given way to a shy strange look, and she surely blushed oftener than she used, or than there was any need for her to do now.

She blushed one morning when I spoke to her.

“For a young lady who began life by detesting all English people *en masse*, you seem to be getting on very well, *cara mia*,” I said to her, at the time I always said everything to her—namely, on her return from mass.

The blush gave way to a sweet grave look. Then the old frank smile came

out once more, like the sun from behind the clouds.

“I shall have to do so,” she said slowly. “I have reason to believe that *la mamma* and *il cugino* now destine me to marry an Englishman.”

I was prepared for the news, as you know. Nevertheless, I felt myself start.

“Who is it?” I asked, merely for the sake of saying something; for I knew—or at least, I thought I knew—who it was, well enough.

But she answered simply—

“I do not know. I do not think anything has been settled yet, but *il cugino* is trying to pave the way, and *la mamma* has been endeavouring to discover my feelings.”

“And what are your feelings?” I said almost roughly. Nor was it till long

afterwards, I reflected that this was a question I had no right to ask.


"I 'do not know,'" she replied again. "Oh! Dacko, I do not know—I wish I did." And she looked round at me, as if she expected me to help her.

"They cannot force your feelings, *carina*," I said, not knowing exactly what to say.

She seemed puzzled, disappointed, and looked away again.

"Of course not," she said, as if feeling my answer was no answer to her, which, in truth, it was not. "And I am going to ask you something, Mr.—*Mr. Travers*. Please call me *contessina* now, instead of *carina*; and let me give up that foolish baby-name of yours. It will be much better to do so, don't you think so?"

"Much better," I responded shortly, feeling rather hurt.



"You see I am nearly a woman, now," she said, quickly guessing my feelings.


"Very nearly," I replied. And, indeed, I thought so. I thought she was a woman already in prudery, and fickleness towards an old friend. It is always the point that pricks our own selves, that seems to us to have grown the longest and sharpest. But I wronged her. She was not a woman yet, though her time was near. She was a child still—only a child in her utter unconsciousness and ignorance.

"Good-bye, Mr. Travers," she said rather shyly.

"Good-bye, *contessina*," I replied—holding her hand in mine a little longer than necessary perhaps; for I felt somehow as if I were saying good-bye to the child Virginia for ever.

She slipped away from me at last, and I glanced up at her windows as she disappeared under the archway. The dark face of Monsignore was glowering out of one of them. He had grown fond of standing in that window of late, and would watch from thence the picnic parties drive away, and smile to himself as they passed out of sight. He was not smiling now, however, but scowling very palpably. What had happened, I wondered. Was the Du Boulay Browns' affair going wrong? Had the young man or his parents proved restive? For my part, I do not think it would much matter if it were so; that is, as far as the *contessina's* own peace of mind was concerned.

As I have before remarked, Monsignore Salvini had no particular liking for my



society. He paid me a visit, though, to-day. It was the first and the last, and the only time he ever entered my studio.


It was nearly dusk when he came, and the picnic people, who had gone out as usual in the morning, must have been just about thinking of turning their faces and their horses' heads homewards. My men were gone, and I had lighted my lamp and drawn out my Virginia, as my way was, whenever I chanced to be alone, when suddenly there came a tap at the door.

“Will you pardon an untimely visit, Signor Travers ? ” said Monsignore’s grating voice, as I opened the door. “I have long been desirous of visiting your studio, but, as you are aware, we servants of the Church have but little time at our disposal.”

“I am happy to have the honour of receiving *monsignore*,” I replied, not over cordially; “though I fear it is rather too dark to see the things properly.” Then I tried to shove my Virginia back behind her curtain, and carried off my lamp to a distant part of the room. But I felt discovery was inevitable.

Monsignore Salvini was a man of quick perception and refined tastes. His appreciation, therefore, was worth having, and insensibly I felt flattered by his remarks.

“That statue of the Princess B——, how full it is of grace and tenderness!” he said, as he went moving on from figure to figure, like a black-coated bee among the flowers. “And as for the bust of the Signorina Chilton, it is admirable. Do you always do portraits, Signor Travers?”



"Very seldom, *monsignore*," I replied. "And even when I do undertake orders of that sort, I seldom do more than begin and finish them. The intermediate stages I leave to my workmen."

"Ah! you must have very excellent workmen, then; or, no doubt, you make them so by your training," said the ecclesiastic, with a bow. "By-the-by, have you not among your men a fellow called Gaetano Pulci?"

"I have a workmen called Gaetano; I do not know his surname," I replied, rather astonished at Monsignore's extreme suavity.

"What sort of fellow is he?"


"A very clever workman. I know nothing more of him."

"Ah, that is because you are an Englishman," returned Monsignore, in a tone

of profound pity. "A Roman would be more cautious, and learn something about the people he employs. But tell me, now"—suddenly interrupting himself,—“tell me, *signor mio*, what great treasure do you keep hidden there behind that curtain?”

The moment of discovery had come. To-morrow all Rome would know my secret, for Monsignore and his friends, like the Athenians of old, loved to have “some new thing” to babble about during their clerical confabulation. There was no escape.

“It is an ideal figure I have been trying to look out,” I said, pushing back the curtain, and, for some occult reason of my own, holding the lamp as high as I could, so that the shadow, and not the light, should fall on the statue’s



face, "What do you think of it, *monsignore*?"

He looked at it for a moment or so, in silence.

"It is perfect," he said at last; "perfect in every way—in feeling, in grace, and in likeness too; for I can see, of course, you have taken my little cousin from over the way as your model."

"Indeed I have not, *monsignore*," I returned quickly. "Lella Noti, the daughter of the old Padre Eterno, who died last year, sat for this. The *contessina* had nothing whatever to do with it. I was not even thinking of her at the time."

"*E vero?*" he said, in a tone of polite incredulity. "Nevertheless, the *bambinella* is pretty enough. Do you not find her so, *signore mio*?"


"Pretty enough as a *bambinella*," I replied; "not pretty enough for my Virginia." I hated myself as I spoke, and my thoughts seemed to start up like flaming swords, and mow down my words. And the light, too, was full on my face.

"Is she not pretty enough for a wife, *signore*?" asked Monsignore slowly, and looking at me.

I set down the lamp with a jarring sound. My arms were aching with having held it up so long.

"She is pretty enough, no doubt," I answer, brushing the dust off my statue's feet; "but she is hardly old enough for a wife, to my mind."

"To your mind—ah no, perhaps; but she might be to another," he returned with a contortion, that could not be called a smile, but might be described



as a diseased chuckle. "And I have such good hopes for her now, as perhaps you may have heard."

I suppose I ought to have answered as Guinevere did to Arthur, "Yea, lord, your hopes are mine." But, instead, I merely said I had heard some rumours of the matter.

"Such a good position," continued Monsignore, rubbing his hands, and rolling his eyes about excitedly. "Immense influence, boundless wealth, even in England where everybody is wealthy. It would be a pity, indeed, if such a cup of happiness were to be dashed from her lips. Do you not think so, *signore*?"

I was rather astonished at this portrait of the young Augustus, and in truth, at first, hardly recognised him in it. The Du Boulay Browns, I knew, were by no

means wealthy people, and were likewise possessed of three other sons, senior to this promising youth. Still, if he were to be the *contessina's* cup of happiness, it was just as well that her careful cousin should be left in ignorance of this little fact. So I simply agreed with him, and said nothing more.

"I am glad to find your opinion coincides with mine," said Monsignore graciously. "I do not mind confessing to you that I have been rather uneasy of late—a little afraid of interference from certain quarters—counter attraction, you know, and that sort of thing. But with your influence to back up mine, I feel I need be so no longer."

I think my brain must suddenly have stopped working as Monsignore spoke, for I hardly understood a word he said.

Whose counter attraction did he fear? And what was he asking me to do? Did he expect me to *puff* young Du Boulay Brown to the *contessina*?


“I am at a loss to understand——” I began, when Monsignore interrupted me once more.

“Listen; was not that the carriage? They are returning from their drive. I must go and meet them. I wish to say a word to *il signore* Chilton. See, he is just helping the *bambinella* to descend from the carriage. How well and happy she looks! *Addio, signore*. A thousand thanks for all your gracious courtesy.”

I followed him to the door. The “*bambinella*,” as he called her, who had jumped out of the carriage without any assistance from Mr. Chilton, looked to

me, as far as I could see by the mingled light of the swinging lamp and a hazy moon rather pale and dispirited. I did not say so, however. Monsignore might have proposed remaining with me to discuss the cause of it. I preferred shutting my door, and meditating upon the matter by myself.

I went back to my Virginia, and sat down before her. Her pure calm beauty soothed my troubled soul, as the moonbeams seem to still the sea. I drank it in, line by line. By-and-by I stretched out my hand, and clasped hers. There was a scratch upon it. I felt it first; then I lifted my lamp, and looked at it. It was a jagged scratch, rough and uneven, and in shape like the cross the butcher sears upon the sheep that are



to be led to the slaughter. I set down my lamp once more. I remembered Monsignore Salvini had touched that hand, as he passed.





CHAPTER IX.

A SERMON. A FAREWELL.

“Let us go hence, my songs : she will not hear.

Let us go hence together without fear.

Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,


And over all old things, and all things dear.


She loves not you nor me as we love her,

Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,

She would not hear.”

A Leave-Taking.

 HERE is a peculiar mental process called by psychologists “thinking a thing out.” It is a hateful process, and a perfectly useless one. You may work a thing out, spin it out, write



it out, dig it out, in some way or other ; but think it out, never ! You only succeed in thinking it in, whatever it may chance to be ; driving it in rather, as with the butt end of a bayonet, in its chaotic, pulpy condition.

This, at least, was all I succeeded in doing, as I sat far into the night, after Monsignore's departure, thinking and thinking, and rubbing away at the scratch on my statue's hand. The priest himself would have been gratified, I think, had he known of my earnest endeavour to extract some meaning out of his interesting conversation. But I failed. Du Boulay Brown, the *contessina*, the Chiltons, the picnic people, all flitted across my brain, like shadows on the wall. But they were shadows of shadows, nothing more. Like the spirit of Socrates, who

came when he was called, but could not speak Greek, so the ghosts of Monsignore's words answered my bidding, but seemed to mean nothing, after all.

I counted them over, one by one. Whose irresistible influence did the priest dread as likely to interfere between his young cousin and the lover he proposed for her? Not the elephantinely witty Oxonian, surely! He was Miss Ada's special property. Besides, it was not possible such a child as the *contessina* could cherish a hopeless passion for such a youth as the Oxonian. Not the archæologist—that was impossible too; and equally so was a weak-eyed curate, fallaciously supposed to be attached to Miss Constance. Not Mr. Chilton, of course—that would be too absurd; nor—nor Malpas. I rose suddenly, and went to bed.

I had evidently been thinking too long. My mind would be clearer in the morning.

I slept late. The *contessina* must long have been back from mass, and my men had been working for a good hour when I woke. I went down, rated them all soundly—it *is* such a relief to make other people uncomfortable when one is uncomfortable one's self,—told Gaetano to do what he could for the statue's hand, took up my cap, and went out.

Under the archway of the Palazzo, Mr. Chilton was standing, with his big hands deep down in his pocket, his little legs very far apart. He whistled me over to him.

“I say, Travers, here's a pretty go! Mary—Miss Chilton, I mean” (magnificently), “has just declared that she will

not be married till she gets back to England. It is most provoking of her, as Chilton Court is just now being restored, and will not be ready for our reception till the middle of May. But I tell you at once, so that you need not hurry so much over the bust."

I expressed my thanks for the information, and added it was an ill wind that did nobody any good. I should now be able to finish my work more satisfactorily.

"It won't do any one else any good," returned Mr. Chilton testily. "And all for a whim too—nothing but a woman's whim!"

"*Some* women's whims are the laws of a queen," said Malpas, who had come up behind us unperceived. "And in that case one can but bow and obey. I presume you are talking of Miss Chilton."

He spoke lightly, but he looked pale and ill, I thought, and years older than when I had seen him last. Had Miss Chilton's determination, then, cost him so much ?

"That's prettily said, my boy," said Mr. Chilton, who had a good heart beating somewhere under that mountain of vulgarity. "And it is hardest upon you, of course,—that it is." Then the future father and son-in-law started off together arm-in-arm, and I went on my way alone.

I went alone, but Malpas seemed to follow me, step by step: Malpas, the boy, who had been here, as the *contessina's* childish companion; Malpas, the youth, who had come back here, as her girlfriend's plighted lover; Malpas, the man, who tarried here, still as—— I turned back suddenly, and went home.

Was Monsignore right in his fears and fancies? Had I been blind so long?

Monsignore Salvini was preaching a course of Lenten sermons in the church of San S——. They were all on his one pet subject, namely, the glorification of the Church; and, financially speaking, at any rate, they were reported to be a success. He was a man of singular eloquence and power, and drew large congregations. There was a good deal of romance attached to him too, which attracted even more interest than his strange dark face, and earnest impassioned manner. It was said, he had been wild in his youth, and inclined to Liberalism; but had since humbled himself, and been freely and fully forgiven by the large heart of *il Papa-Ré*. It was


also said he had loved once, and become a priest because his love was vain;—that the first fair penitent he had shriven had been the lady of his love;—and that learning thus, too late, his error and his sin, his reason had reeled for a time. However this might be, there was no priest in all Rome more popular in certain circles than Monsignore Salvini; though among the lower orders, he was, no doubt, less loved than feared.

It must be confessed that I seldom went to church. Sometimes, for the sake of my mother's memory, I used to go to the room outside the Piazza del Popolo, and listen to the grand old words I had first heard as I knelt by her side. But of the Roman churches I knew nothing. I seldom entered any of them, unless, indeed, a friend of mine chanced to be

living within their walls, such as the Mosé at San Pietro in Vincoli and the Pietà at St. Peter's. Then I visited them, not otherwise.

Nevertheless, though San S—— has no statues, only jewelled robes for its waxen Madonna and tinsel hangings for its marble walls, and though Monsignore's discourse was not likely to do me much good in a sermonic point of view, I determined to go thither, and listen to him to-day. The sight of his dark face, and the sound of his harsh voice, might, perhaps, help to clear away some of the hateful ideas his vague words had left upon my mind last night.

It was a grand sight, artistically speaking. The church was crowded in every corner, and with every class of worshipper. There were *principesse* with their




footmen, and velvet cushions and gilt missal-books ; and Trasteverine with dark passionate faces, and white handkerchiefs folded across their black heads. There were priests of every rank and kind—from the cassocked student to the mitred bishop;—there were Zouaves in their quaint grey uniforms, and capuchins bearded and barefoot ; while, here and there, one saw an Englishman or two hiding behind the pillars, and wearing that shame-faced look they usually contrive to put on in church. The high altar was one blaze of misty light, through which the jewelled robes were gleaming and the censers swinging, while a low soft music went beating backwards and forwards, now and then, like the waves of the sea ;—till by-and-by there came a silence, and Monsignore Salvini rose up

in the pulpit, and, without preface or preamble, spoke straight to the hearts of all those people with eager upturned faces.

“My friends,” he said, kissing the crucifix and laying it down before him, “some will tell you that the last day is at hand, that the earth is ripe for the sickle, and the Reaper ready to gather in the harvest. Some see already the shadow of His coming, and are quick to hear the sound of His chariot wheels. But I, for one, tell you this is not so. It cannot be. It may not be. The Bridegroom still tarries because ‘the Bride is not yet adorned for her Husband.’ Her garments are torn in twain by those who say they serve her; her jewels are scattered over the whole world, and but few of them are laid at her feet. She cries for help, but none hears. She weeps for her people—the young men and maidens who dedicated themselves to her service, but who since have taken the wages of the wicked one,—the little children she once knew, who have strayed away from her arms,—the old people who die without a word of

comfort from her lips ;—she weeps for them all, and none cares. She stands there with rent robes and streaming eyes, and you go by and laugh. She is no Bride, you say. She is more like a *Mater Dolorosa*. Ah ! that is true, sadly true ; but whose fault is it ? *Yours*, my brother, and *yours*, my sister—yours and mine. You have rent her garments by your strife and discord. You have robbed her of her jewels, her pure gold and pearls, and all manner of precious stones. You have taken her treasures and hidden them away ; or, worse still, you have spent them upon yourselves. Therefore doth the Bridegroom tarry. Therefore the Church, His Bride, cannot make herself ready for His coming. And how long shall these things be ? How long ? I ask. But you answer not. Oh, dear my brothers, and dear my sisters, will you not say : ‘ To-day they shall cease. To-day we will give back to the Church that which belongeth to the Church ? ’ But no, you are silent. You whisper among yourselves : ‘ We are so poor ; ’ you say : ‘ We have so little—nothing worth offering—nothing worth giving to the Lord.’ Nay, but it

is not for you to judge of that. Give, and see what the Lord will do with it. Listen! Have you never seen any of those diamond ornaments worn by great ladies? They are flowers rather than ornaments, roses of jewels, leaves made out of gems, and glittering with diamonds instead of dewdrops. And how are they made? Out of atoms of precious stones, scrapings and shavings that other people might fling away; but a jeweller knows their value, and knows, too, what can be made out of them when set all together. It is the whole that is beautiful—the flowers made out of so many bits. You are none of you so poor but that you have something to give to Christ and His Church. Give yourselves, at least, if you have nothing else. Give your children, mothers. Let go your worldly hopes, and dedicate them, as Hannah dedicated her son, to the Lord. So shall you find them again after many days, garnishing the walls of the New Jerusalem. Give yourselves, young girls. Follow not the dictates of your own sinful hearts and affections, but obey your spiritual directors, and follow that which the Church



commands. So shall ye be as pearls, pure and chaste, hung about the neck of the spotless Virgin. Give your millions, rich men ; give your mites, ye poor ones : they are both alike priceless diamonds in the eyes of the Bride and her Spouse. For these are the Church's jewels, without which she cannot go forth to meet the Bridegroom. It is for you to hasten that day, my brothers. It is for me to pray that the dawn may be near, though the night is still dark. O Blessed Father in Heaven ! " added *monsignore*, suddenly sinking upon his knees, " if it be Thy good will, oh let that day come, ere my tongue be dumb : so that I shall sing my *Nunc Dimittis* with joy. . . . "


The preacher's voice failed him as he prayed, but his face shone with earnestness and fervour. The people sat still for a moment, mute, and looking up ; then silently they began to move away.

Monsignore's words had stirred their hearts to the depths, and they were in

that strange, excited condition when every sort of feeling seems to come bubbling up to the surface, as it were, upside down. A child might have led them, or "a reed shaken with the wind." It was just the kind of sermon to thrill these impressionable southern natures—rugged, fantastic, poetical, and yet delivered with a truth and earnestness that forced its way upon their attention.

The men stood together in groups, talking gravely; the women walked away in silence. I found myself wondering how it would have affected the *contessina*, had she been present.

As this thought passed through my brain, I saw her suddenly going down the church-steps, with Malpas by her side. It was not the first time my thoughts had taken shape, been realized, as it



were, with regard to her. I remembered the day in San Pietro in Vincoli; and yet, somehow, I was startled.

The sun was setting behind the hills and the houses, and his flames lighted up her face as she went quickly across the Piazza. I could see it plainly—a white face with misty blue eyes, and that look, half sweet, half startled, I had caught upon it that Carnival day when I touched her hand on the balcony. What did it mean by being there again? Was she frightened now? I could not wait to answer these questions to myself.

“Good evening,” I said, overtaking them, and, in my haste, nearly overturning poor old Filoména, who was hobbling along behind them. “Are you not going to wait for Miss Chilton?” I added,

rather surprised at seeing them turn deliberately up the next street.

They looked round as I spoke. They had not seen me before, and they did not seem to be over well-pleased to see me now.

"Miss Chilton is not here," said the *contessina*, gravely.

"She did not care to come," added Malpas, quickly. "She does not understand Italian sufficiently well to appreciate *monsignore*. Besides, she is not fond of sermons, as a rule."

"And you are, I suppose?" I said, with a meaning look. "Are you going to walk home then, *contessina*? If so, will you let me walk with you?"

She would have refused, I think, had she known how to do so. But as she did not, she remained silent. As for

Malpas, he openly scowled, and no doubt wished me at the bottom of the sea. But I did not care, I kept my place by the *contessina's* side.

I remember I talked a little, and she answered me. I don't think Malpas spoke at all. I remember I asked after the Du Boulay Browns, and received the information that they had gone to Naples. I remember Monsignore Salvini passed us in the Corso, and frowned fiercely at me. I suppose he meant it for Malpas, but at the time I scarcely noticed it. I remember nothing clearly. It was like walking through a fog, and being unable to recognize even well-known objects as I passed them by.

And I had been in a fog so long. Monsignore was right then, after all.

At the corner of the Corso, Malpas left

us. He said he was going to the English club, and turned away without shaking hands. The *contessina* and I walked on in silence up the Via Frattina, and crossed the Piazza di Spagna.

"My dear," I said, "my dear——" and then I stopped. I felt I must say something, but I did not know how to begin.

"You are not to call me that, Mr. Travers," she said, with a sort of fierce, cold dignity. "And I wish you would not walk with me so much. *La mamma* does not like it."

"Has she told you so?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes, and *il cugino* also."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I could not prevent it entirely, but I promised to do what I could."



“Could not prevent it!” I repeated, while my blood began to burn, and my senses seemed suddenly—

“Wrecked, and whirled,
Round and round, in a gulf of the sea.”

“Did you wish to prevent it, then?”

She hung her head a little, like a flower the sun has scorched; but she answered nothing.

“Did you wish to prevent it?” I asked again.

She looked up for a moment, as if trying to brave it out; then her head drooped once more, and she sighed, rather than spoke, the one word—

“Yes.”

I turned upon her bitterly.

“You may have your wish, then; you can keep your promise, *contessina*. I

will never willingly walk or talk with you any more. But—but forgive me,” I stammered, laying my hand on her arm; “and for the sake of old times, which I, at least, can never forget, let me say one word more. You are so young, you do not know—you cannot understand——”

“I do not want to understand,” she cried passionately, shaking my hand off her arm, as Paul of old “shook off the beast into the fire.” “I only want you to leave me alone.’

It was enough—too much, in fact. I stood still, and let her go past me in silence.

She went on, without another word.

She went on, down the dim dusky street, beyond my reach, beyond my speech, out of sight,—the child I had

loved, the girl I had watched grow up as a flower, the woman I had tried to warn out of the fulness of my heart, and who had shaken me off as an unclean thing. We made no sign either of us.

Once I followed her, but it was of no use. I fancy she knew my step, and heard it close behind her, and so walked a little quicker in consequence. That was all.

And so she went on, and on, through the deepening darkness, till my straining eyes could see her no more. And the light seemed to fade out of my life, as the daylight died, and Rome was no longer Rome to me.

There was always my Virginia, of course. But somehow, for once, the ideal seemed to be swallowed up in the real.

It must always be so, when the time comes for measuring man's counterfeits against God's creations, whether it be poetry as against the song of the birds, or music as against the sound of the waters, or man's love as against God's love. And such a time comes to each of us—artists, toilers, lovers though we be—once at least in our lives.

“And the wise men, and the sorcerers, and the magicians of Egypt cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents; but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.”





CHAPTER X.

AT LAST.

"Being a woman, I must bear the pains and pangs of womanhood."

SOMETIMES the thread of life seems suddenly to unwind itself with a rush and a whirl that is absolutely bewildering. At other times it draws itself out so slowly and sluggishly, one almost fancies that Time, or Fate, or whoever it be that holds the reel, has forgotten to give it a turn.

My life hitherto had been calm and

tranquil as an artist's should be. It began to grow turbulent as an actor's now.

There was a fog next morning. There had been one, so it seemed to me, hanging about my soul all the night past; but there was a real fog in the morning, thick as a London one, if not quite as yellow, and folded like a blanket over the whole slumbering city.

I went out notwithstanding. I felt stifled within walls.

It was still early, five or six o'clock, I fancy, but I had lost all count of time, and the state of the sky did not help one to guess the hour. I locked my studio door behind me, and put the key in my pocket. I should certainly be back before the men's working hour.

I went tramping on through the fog

and the mist. It was very cold and damp, but I scarcely noticed that then. I don't know how far I walked, nor which way I went, but by-and-by I found myself standing under the ilex-trees on the terrace outside the French Academy. There was no one stirring yet, however, except the weary French sentinel pacing up and down, across the steps, and some one who seemed to be similarly employed in the piazza below. I could not make out who this was, and I did not care. The rest of the Holy City lay fast asleep beneath its blanket of fog.

Presently the little tinkling bell of the convent church began to ring, and a few drowsy-looking people came climbing up the steps, through the mist—a woman with a basket; a couple of priests; a Zouave, with the peaked hood of his

cloak twisted round his collarless throat ; a little model, shivering visibly under her open velvet bodice ; then three people walking together — two women and a man. They all turned into the church, and the door was shut. Where was the *contessina* ? Not there to-day, for I had counted the people as they came up together in groups. *And she always went to mass alone with Filoména.*

I would wait till the service was over. Then I should see. I might have overlooked her, of course.

I remembered my words of last night. I was not going to speak to her again, only to look at her from a distance, and, as it were, by chance. At least, if it were not chance that had brought me to this exact spot, at this exact moment, what else could it be ?

Meanwhile the fog cleared off, and the sun came bursting forth in his splendour. I could see quite plainly down the steps now. The weary sentinel was still at his post, but there was no one pacing up and down in the piazza below. That must have been my fancy, I suppose.

By-and-by, the church door opened, and the worshippers came out one by one. First the little model girl, leaping up in the air as she saw the sun; then the woman with her basket; then the Zouave, loosening his hood; then the priests, talking together softly; and lastly—yes, lastly—a tall slim girl, in a long dark cloak, and a handsome youth by her side.

For a second I stood paralyzed with passion.

It was Malpas!—it was the *contessina*!

but where was the *contessina*'s attendant ?
Where was Filoména ?

I think, now, the faithful old creature was close at hand, detained for a moment behind the curtain at the church door; but at the time I thought she was not there at all and that the *contessina* was alone with her friend's faithless lover. I forgot what had passed between us last night—I forgot my vow—I forgot everything; and I followed the pair as fast as I could down the steps. They seemed to me to fly—I flew, too.

They had a good start of me, however, and I was never fleet of foot. They seemed to be going down—down, hand in hand,—and step by step,—and I was incapable of hindering or helping them. They were talking together, eagerly, earnestly; or, rather, he was talking and





*"But even as he spoke, she matched her
hand out of his, and tore herself away."*

P 162.

she was listening, for her face was raised to his, and his head was bent to hers. I could see that much, but I could hear nothing.

As they reached the last flight of steps they stood still for a second. I slackened my pace, and went softly. They did not hear the sound of my steps, for he was still talking. They did not see me, either of them, though I was close behind them now, for they were gazing only and wholly into each other's faces.

I heard him speak the one word—the one name of God oftener taken in vain than all the others put together—

“Love!”

But even as he spoke, she snatched her hand out of his, and tore herself away.

“Oh, God!” she cried, clenching her fists as if to hold her heart's great agony.

“I understand—I understand at last——”
And then, with a moan, she dashed away like a stricken deer, past me—up the steps, and so into the church once more.

Whether she saw me, or not, I cannot tell; but I saw her—saw for a second her wet white face, with its “great drowned eyes,” and pale lips, as it flashed past me; and I stood still, and saw it still—long, long after she had passed.

By-and-by—how long after I do not know; it may have been an hour, it may have been a second; it seemed like a lifetime to me—I felt a touch on my shoulder.

“Scoundrel!” I began fiercely, and without turning round. “What did you say to her? What did you do to her——” I thought it was Malpas who had touched me, but I found it was only old Filoména.

“*Che! che!*” she was saying in her cracked treble voice. “Where is the *contessina*, *signor mio*? She ran down the steps with the *signorino Inglese*, and now they have probably hidden themselves somewhere. They are just as great babies now, as they were ten years ago.”

That was her creed, poor simple old soul!—once a child, always a child; and to such women their children never grow up. It is a way many folks have, and there is a great deal of pathos about it.

“The *contessina* has gone back to church,” I replied as collectedly as I could. “Did you not pass her on the steps? *Il signorino Inglese*——” I looked round. Where was *il signorino Inglese*?

It was a question many people asked,

but none could answer for months and months after that day.

Old Filoména hobbled up the steps again. I followed her slowly. The church door was still open. I pushed back the curtain, and went in.

There was still a smell of incense, and still a sort of fog inside the church. I could see nothing at first. By degrees, however, my eyes growing used to the dimness, as our souls grow used to sorrow, and our bodies to pain, I made out the figure of a girl crouching before the high altar, or rather before the heavy gates that rail in the altar. Her hands were still clenched, and her face was hidden in them. Every now and then her shoulders heaved a little, and her whole body swayed to and fro, like a young tree in a storm of wind and rain.

But she made no other sign—no sob, no groan, nor moan. Behind her knelt Filoména, grim, devout, obtuse, as old folks whose bodies have outlived their souls, and who have forgotten their youth, and all its pangs and pains, sometimes are.

I looked at the *contessina* for a moment in silence. Then I turned and left the church. I dared not watch her now. She was a child no longer. She was a woman at last—a woman both by love, and by pain.





CHAPTER XI.

“AH! WOE FOR YOUNG VIRGINIA, THE
SWEETEST MAID IN ROME!”



WENT slowly homewards.

The streets were just beginning to be astir. The shopmen were taking down their shutters, and laughing, and gesticulating, and showing their white teeth, and shaking their black heads, as they set out their funny tempting wares on little rickety sloping tables, that jutted out far over the narrow pavement. Round the fountain in the piazza, the models

were gathered, waiting to be hired, like slaves in the market-place of old. Down the twisting, deep-coloured streets, the country carts were creaking and creeping, drawn by beautiful, sleepy-eyed, slow-footed bullocks, and laden with mysterious provender for man and beast, while—

“Blithely on brass and timber the craftsman’s stroke
was ringing,
And blithely o’er her panniers the market-girl was
singing.”

It was the same Rome still—the Rome of the maid Virginia; and over and over again, as long as men and women live and love—

“With weeping and with laughter,
Still is the story told.”

The street in which I lived, and in which the Palazzo Salvini stood, was

usually a quiet one. This morning, however, there seemed to be quite a little crowd gathered near my studio door.

“Here comes *il Signore Scultore*,” said some one as I drew near. And then the crowd parted a little, and I saw, in the far perspective, a vision of four gendarmes in full regimentals and cocked hats—very much cocked.

“Gaetano Pulci has been arrested, and *il signore* is recommended to leave Rome before twelve hours have elapsed,” said some one else, making way for me to pass.

The crowd was mainly composed of workmen and models going to their morning work. They were sympathetic, but indifferent. They were tolerably well used to such excitement. Arrests were as daily bread to them, poor things! and

very bitter, black bread they found it. Nevertheless, they could not refrain from looking on, whenever they had a chance of seeing it forced down the throat of some unfortunate comrade.

“It is not true,” I said, throwing my head back, and drawing myself up to my full height, which as I have before remarked, was not very great after all. “I am an English subject.”

“Just so, *signore*,” returned the captain of the gendarmes with a sinister smirk. “Just so, *il signore* is English—*il signore* is recommended to return to England, *ecco!*”

“And Gaetano was the best workman I ever had!” I went on, taking no notice of my friend’s polite remarks.

“Just so,” repeated the *capitano*, with another grim grin, which his aides-de-camp copied as accurately as possible.

“Where is Monsignore Salvini?” I said, suddenly inspired by a remembrance of the priest’s mysterious visit to my studio, and his inquiries about Gaetano. “He would settle this for me, if I could only see him.”

“Ah! *si*—just so—it would no doubt be very good for *il Signore Scultore*, if he could see Monsignore Salvini,” replied *il capitano*, grinning still. “It is not to be thought that his reverence is as yet up and abroad, as we poor folks are forced to be; nevertheless, if *il Signore Scultore* chooses to wait, Monsignore will, no doubt, admit him to his presence before the whole twelve hours have elapsed.” A perfect volley of smiles from his comrades in arms.

Il Signore Scultore, however, did not choose to wait, but crossed the street at

once, to the Palazzo. From the other end of the street, which opened out on the piazza, a flood of light came streaming and straying. And down that light, as it were a pathway swept, and kept, by angels for her, the *contessina* was floating. She seemed to me to be moving in rather a zigzag sort of way, and, every now and then, to trip, or stumble a little. But that might be the effect of the light, and, anyhow, at that moment I was not thinking much about her. I was thinking chiefly of my own fate, and Gaetano's.

Monsignore's apartments in the Palazzo Salvini were on the *mezzanine* floor, between that let to Mr. Chilton and the upper one occupied by the *contessa*. I climbed up the stone stairs, and knocked at the door.

I stood there waiting some time. The

priest was not early in his habits, I knew, and his servants probably followed their master's example. I was determined to gain admittance, however, and did not mind waiting here, out of sight of the grinning gendarme and his apish companions.

Whilst I stood there, I heard the sound of a step on the stairs below. Patter, patter it came, very softly and slowly, but nearer and nearer. It was the *contessina*, I thought, coming home from church; and my thought was not wrong. Up the stairs she came, breathing a little heavily, and catching hold of the banisters as she ascended. I drew myself back into the shadow of the door. After our conversation of last night, it might vex her, perhaps, to see me standing there. She passed on, however, and did not see me.

She passed on, and I came out of my hiding-place, and looked up, and watched her, as she went climbing up the steep, twisting stairs, and trembling a little, as she went.

Suddenly (how it happened, I do not know, but I suppose she must have missed her footing, or lost her balance, or tripped and slipped somehow), I heard a faint cry, then a rush, a hush, and something fell into my arms—something white and wan as my marble Virginia, but warm still, as a bird that has just been shot, and unconscious as——

“*È morta, è morta! la contessina è morta!*” cried old Filoména, who came rushing down the stairs a moment later. And various servants, running out from various places, echoed the cry.

As for me, I said nothing—I knew

nothing. All I did know was that she had laughed and loved; that she had tripped and fallen; that she had stolen my heart away years ago, and flung it back in my face last night; and now I held her in my arms. Was she dead?

I could not say, I could not speak, I could not even answer myself in that dumb, soundless, wordless, fashion in which we do sometimes answer our own questions. For, for the moment, I think I was as one dead myself.





CHAPTER XII.

A TRAGEDY OF ERRORS.

“Smothered in errors, feeble, shallow, weak.”

Antipholus of Syracuse.

SHE was not dead, but she was very ill. It was impossible to say, just at first, what injuries, external or internal, had been received by the fall; but the doctor feared concussion of the brain. Gigi, who had been for some time past in Naples (he had gone there, poor fellow, soon after Malpas arrived in Rome), was telegraphed for; the mother

hung in speechless agony over the young daughter's unconscious form, while as for Filoména, she tore her grey hair, and wrung her old hands alternately, and made herself generally useless and incapable.

For myself, I do not think I quitted the Palazzo the whole morning, but wandered like an unquiet spirit up and down the breezy staircase, and haunted the landing that led to the *contessa's* rooms, and listened eagerly to any stray news brought to me by any one.

Miss Chilton came up the stairs whilst I was thus employed. I had scarcely seen her since that strange Carnival day, and she seemed to me to be changed somehow. There was more sweetness, as well as more sadness, in her face, and more dignity and self-possession about her altogether.

"I hear Virginia is ill," she said in her soft tuneful voice (and it was a very sad tune that was in it to-day). "Do you think I might go to her, Mr. Travers? I nursed my own dear mother through a long illness; and the *contessa* is so delicate, and Filoména so old, I might, perhaps, be of some little use."

I replied I was sure she would be of the greatest possible assistance. Then I held back the curtain for her, and she disappeared behind it.

A few minutes later she re-appeared.

"Poor child," she said, as calmly and quietly as ever, though her face was flushed a little. "She screamed out the moment she saw me. It is the first sign of consciousness she has given, but I must be more careful not to frighten her another time. Could you get us some ice, please, Mr. Travers?"

I flew downstairs to execute her orders. In moments of intense anxiety there is no relief like action, and I felt at that moment ready to fall down and kiss Miss Chilton's feet in gratitude.

The gendarmes were still standing before my studio door. I had totally forgotten their existence till that moment, and the sight of them did not trouble me much now. My own workmen were loitering about, too. They had come in for an unexpected holiday, but they were not enjoying it much, poor fellows! The rest of the crowd had dispersed.

"Only eight hours more, *Signore Scultore*," croaked the gendarmes in chorus. They had been standing there themselves for four hours in the sun, and were rather cross in consequence. But I made no answer to them.

“Have you seen Monsignore Salvini, *caro signore?*” cried Cecco, one of the younger workmen, running across the road to meet me. He was a good lad, and a favourite, but I made him no answer either. What, to me, was going or staying, or, for once, all the statues in the world, and the makers thereof, while the child—the little child, Virginia, lay hovering betwixt life and death?

“There is no change,” said Miss Chilton, coming out once or twice during those sad lagging hours, and finding me still lingering about the landing. And all day long they said the same thing.

Monsignore Salvini sent for me at last. Since that dreadful moment on the stairs, when I had caught the *contessina* in my arms, I had not bestowed a single thought upon the coming interview.

Nor was I in the least anxious as to its result. Over poor Gaetano the ecclesiastic might, no doubt, exercise his priestly, as well as his civil, authority; but over me he could have no such right. Besides, there was always the British Consul and *charge-d'affaires* to appeal to in case of difficulty. So I obeyed the summons with an anxious heart, but the anxiety was not for myself.

It was late in the afternoon when he sent for me, and it was almost dark inside the Palazzo. Monsignore's rooms were handsomely furnished with rare pictures, and inlaid crucifixes, and many mediæval adornments. But the swinging lamps were scarcely as much use as so many fireflies, and the dim religious light was very confusing. I stumbled over a footstool as I entered. I could see Mon-

signore himself plainly enough, however, as he went pacing up and down the room, in his many-buttoned *soutane* and violet stockings. There always seemed to be a sort of phosphorescent light about him.

“Pray be seated,” he said. But he remained standing himself. So I stood too.

His dark haggard face looked wilder, more perturbed, than ever; and he began talking at once in a rapid, rather incoherent, way. He seldom gave me time to say anything, but read my words off my face, as it were, and answered them too, without their ever having been spoken. It is a way many Italians have; and a very tiresome way it is, if you care at all about the sound of your own voice, or the expression of your own thoughts.

“It was a sad business—yes, very sad.

Ah! *il signore* was thinking about the *contessina's* accident?—that was sad too, no doubt; but the doctor had just assured him there was no special cause for anxiety. There was no change at present?—no, nor would there be for some days: that could hardly be expected. But about the *signore's* own business. An order had been issued, which the *signore* naturally desired to disobey, and which his friends, even more ardently than himself, desired that he should disobey.” (Monsignore bows—I bow in return.) “Unfortunately, those desires could not be gratified. There was no one more sorry than *monsignore* himself, but he had made inquiries on all sides, and found that it was impossible to recall the order. Peace must be maintained within the Holy City; and

Gaetano was undoubtedly a Garibaldino, and it was feared that he was not the only one within the studio of *il Signore Scultore*——”

I had let him run on for some time in silence. But I burst in boldly here.

“For Gaetano, I say nothing. I am sorry for the fellow, and shall do what I can to help him. But I know I cannot interfere in his behalf. For myself, however, I shall claim the protection of the British Government.”

He started as I spoke, and looked at me keenly. Had he not calculated on this move on my part; or, was he astonished at my fronting him thus boldly? No doubt, hitherto, he had regarded me as some poor mean creature—a *gobbo*—a worm, fit only to be crushed beneath his heel.

“Of course *il Signore Scultore* can appeal to his Government,” he resumed, coldly, after a pause. “I am not quite sure that the matter lies within their province; but it can, of course, be laid before the authorities. It is too late to do so to-day, however,” he added, looking at his watch, and growing more and more deliberate; “but you need go no further than the frontier to-night, and from thence you can communicate your wishes by letter; in which case your return to Rome will probably be ensured within a week. But I hardly think you will wish to do so, when——. Signor Travers” (suddenly changing his icy tone to one of almost passionate entreaty), “do you remember our last conversation together, and my visit to your studio opposite, when you were gracious enough

to show me some of your beautiful works of art? ”

I bowed an answer. This sudden change bewildered me. It was like an atmospheric change—sunshine after snow, calm after whirlwind, and I had not yet thrown off my outer wraps.

“Then you will also, no doubt, remember that on that occasion I not only ventured to warn you of this very fellow Gaetano, but likewise entreated your co-operation in a matter which I had then in hand, and very much at heart.”

I bowed again. “You mean the *contessina’s* projected marriage,” I muttered, under my breath.

“I do,” he replied solemnly; “and that project has since been frustrated.”

It was the first good word I had heard to-day, and my heart leapt as I heard

it; nevertheless, remembering in whose presence I stood, I managed to mumble out something about being sorry.

“Do you know by whom it has been frustrated?” he said, looking fixedly at me.

“No. By whom?”

“By *you!*” he returned, hissing the words out like burning flames into my face.

“By *me!*” I repeated, turning upon him fiercely, and wishing that priests were not exempt, by all laws of civilization, from personal assaults. “How by me?”

“‘How by you?’ Do you dare ask that?” stammered Monsignore, rolling his eyes about in a sort of frenzy. “Have you not hung about the child, fondled her, flattered her, stolen her heart away inch by inch, ever since the days

when she used to say, in her silly, baby way, 'I love Dacko better than any one else,' till last night, when she passionately declared she would never marry at all? Once, she said, she might have done so; but not now—she knew better now. It was of no use to make any overtures for her to Mr. Chilton."

"*Mr. Chilton!*" "I——" I gasped. "I thought——"

"Yes, Mr. Chilton!" continued Monsignore, clasping his hand behind his back, and beginning to tramp up and down the room once more. "Mr. Chilton, whose enormous wealth would, if properly managed, not only redound to the glory of the Church, but also go far towards restoring the ancient honour and fame of the Salvini family, was the *sposo* we destined for the *contessina*. But she

will not hear of it. She will not even listen to reason; though, when pressed further, she confesses that she knows what love is now, and he she loves is an Englishman, too, though she can not wed him either. And she's right there—by all the saints she's right! I'll take care of that; though, no doubt, the said Englishman, remembering that an English earl once gave his daughter in marriage to a Flemish painter, sees no reason why he, too, should not place the *contessina's* coronet beside his sculptor's chisel. 'How by you?' Do you dare ask such a question, when, over there, you keep the evidence of your love hidden away as a guilty thing, but plain to all who visit your studio and peep behind your curtain;—thus compromising the *contessina*——”

“Halt there!” I shouted, as a general might shout to his army. And, in truth, there seemed to be a whole army of wild, turbulent thoughts coursing through my brain. “It is enough—the *contessina* shall no longer be compromised by the statue.” And I turned, and left him.

I was a little man, as I have said; ugly and mis-shapen rather, though that was less apparent now than it had been in my younger days. Nevertheless, had I been Hercules himself, going—

“Striding off, on that straight way
Leads to Larissa, and the silent tomb,”

the people could not have drawn back more wonderingly than they did, as I came out from under the archway, and crossed the street to my studio.

The crowd had thickened again. The

working hours were over, and some of my fellow-artists, having heard of my misfortune, had come out to me with kindly offers of help. I saw them all, as the rider of a runaway horse sees the faces of his friends as he flies past them. But I spoke to none of them.

I went through them—slowly, steadily, silently. Monsignore's face had been scarlet with rage, and distorted with passion; but mine, I fancy, was only very white, and very determined-looking. I turned the key of my studio-door deliberately; I drew back the curtain, and let the last lingering light of day fall upon my marble Virginia.

There was a shout behind me. They had, none of them, ever seen her before; few of them even knew of her existence. For a little moment they held

their breaths, and drank in, as I did, her pure, perfect, passionless beauty ;—then, of a sudden, there arose a yell.

I had raised my arm, and smitten my Virginia down to the ground.

She lay there, shivered into a thousand atoms; and the people yelled round me, full of pity and wonderment; but I only laughed, and said, “There was no way but this;” and “Death is better than dishonour.”

I suppose I went mad in that hour. I think some one spoke to me; I think Cecco touched me. But I responded to neither. I only stood still, and laughed as I looked at the love and labour of my life, shattered to nothingness by a touch, like a frost-flower brought suddenly into a hot room.

“There will be the less to pack up,”

said the gendarme, pushing his way in, and laughing roughly; “and *il signore* has only an hour.” But I think, even he, in his heart of hearts, had pity on me: an Italian has always so strong a feeling for art, no matter how coarse his tastes may be in other matters. It is part of his religion.

I roused myself at last, and gave some orders to my men. Cecco—good, faithful lad—stood beside me, and interpreted them to the rest. Otherwise, I scarcely think they would have understood them. I gave him some money for Gaetano, and bade him do what he could for the poor fellow.

Then I drove away from the Palazzetto Salvini, within whose walls my marble Virginia had sprung into being, and from whose windows I had watched the other

Virginia grow up as a flower, but which now would see my face no more.

I glanced up at the Palazzo as I passed. There were lights shining in the *contessa's* room, and shadows flitting to and fro, athwart the lights.

How was it with the child? How would it be with her?

For me—the secret, the love of my life, had been discovered only to be destroyed. Death, at that moment, had seemed to me better than life.

But for her——

For her—long ago I remembered her saying in her quaint childish way, that life must always be better than death, because of love.

I was mad—mad—quite mad, no doubt, and yet I laughed as I remembered those words.



CHAPTER XIII.

TO ENGLAND AND BACK.

*“Aspettare, e non venire,
Stare in letto, e non dormire,
Servire, e non gradire,
Son tre cose da far morire.”*

ROBA DI ROMA.

I WAS certainly mad when I left Rome for Florence that night. But I remained long enough in “the flower-town” to recover my reason. I think the first thing that brought me back to my senses, was the remembrance

of Monsignore Salvini's project, and how it had been frustrated. I laughed at this over and over again. I laughed still oftener over my own part in the affair.

It was Mr. Chilton, not young Du Boulay Brown, whom Monsignore had destined to become the *sposo* of the *contessina*. It was me, not Malpas, whom he feared as an interloper: me—do you understand?—me, the *gobbo*, the sculptor, the child's old friend, whom she had laughed at, and learnt from, and loved, too, a little. I hardly understood it myself, and when I did do so at last, I laughed again.

It seemed to me the maddest plot that ever entered into any man's mind; and yet, do you know, it comforted me somehow. Such strange things have power to comfort men sometimes.

Old Mr. Chilton was probably innocent of all knowledge, or share in the affair; but I, was I equally innocent—innocent in feeling, if I had been so in deed; or had Monsignore Salvini helped me to a discovery?

A discovery! Was it a discovery to me to find out now, that I had loved the child all her life long, with a love that had grown as she had grown, but which would not die, even if she did? I do not know. Perhaps it was.

Perhaps it was for this that my Virginia had suffered death.

And she—the *contessina*?

She had loved me once. Monsignore had said so in his rage:—and he was always right, the children used to say.

On revient toujours à ses premiers amours. So they say in France—and

in France, being the land of love, they ought to know.

I also stayed in Florence long enough to receive many letters from Conte Gigi.

I had begged him to write, and the boy was a good boy, and wrote very often. I think it gave him pleasure to do so, himself.

He told me that his sister had had a severe attack of brain fever, but was pulling through bravely; that the *signorina* (Miss Chilton) had nursed her like a sister; that Sir Wilfrid Malpas had most strangely and mysteriously left Rome the same day that I did, and had not been heard of since; that Mr. Chilton was in a great state of fuss in consequence, and his daughter evidently very anxious, though she never complained; that Cecco had collected some of the bits

of my broken Virginia, and presented one of them to the *signorina* as a sacred relic ; that Monsignore still spoke bitterly against me, and that my return to Rome would not be advisable at present.

There was always more about the *signorina* than the *contessina* in Gigi's letters, but I did not mind that. I knew it gave him pleasure to write like this—a foolish vain pleasure, no doubt, but still a pleasure. And they were pleasant letters to get, too—frank, outspoken, straightforward as the boy was himself—as the girl had been, also, in the old days.

They grew more buoyant as the weeks went on. Sir Wilfrid still made no sign ; the *sorellina* was progressing favourably ; the *signorina* had gone hither and thither, done this, said that—so the letters re-

peated over and over again, till at last came one announcing that the nurse and patient had gone to Albano for change of air, while Mr. Chilton made a hurried journey to England, in the hope of hearing something of the still absent Malpas.

It was about this time I made up my mind to visit England myself.

It was June—the leafy month of June—when, if ever, the English climate may be expected to smile on her visitors. It was also fifteen years since I had seen any of my relations; so it seemed to be a sort of duty to them, as well as to myself, to make myself known to them once more.

There were but few of them. Both my parents had long been dead. My only sister was married to a clergyman in the Fens. I had an aunt in Scotland, and

one or two stray relations scattered over the face of the country. These were all, and they had none of them expressed any unbounded desire to see me ; nevertheless, having made up my mind, I went.

So I travelled away from the burning blue skies, and the great misty olivewoods, and the showers of fireflies ;—and went clambering over a mountain—bleak, and black, and bare—and came winding down on the other side into a pleasant land still, full of vineyards and cornfields, and bright-faced people, who laughed as they spoke ;—till the sea was passed, and I found myself shooting through tunnels, and racing past trees like sponges, and houses like band-boxes—and I knew, by the sullen look of the sky, and the surly ways of the people, that this was England.

An artist is a cosmopolitan, no doubt ;

but I fancy he lives less well in England than elsewhere. Her people may be truer than others, perhaps ; but they lack that ready, out-spoken sympathy which is to be found in sunnier lands, and without which an artist's soul is starved.

I bought an English newspaper as I went scudding along in the train. It seemed the correct thing to do ; but I did not care much about English politics. I knew so little of them. So I turned the paper over and over, till an extract from a Roman clerical journal caught my eye, and I read the following paragraph—

“No further information has been received of the English Milordo Malpas, whose mysterious disappearance from Rome two months ago caused so great a sensation in fashionable circles. It will be remembered that the Englishman was last seen walking at a rapid pace outside the Portà Pia. We reported this at the

time, and since then an injudicious contemporary has hinted that he might have fallen into the hands of brigands. This hypothesis, or reflection, must, however, be dismissed as improbable, as a large reward was offered for Milordo's person, which reward the brigands would surely have claimed had it been possible for them to do so. It is, nevertheless, unfortunately true that there are many Garibaldians hiding in the Campagna; and into the hands of these people, far worse than any brigands, the young Englishman may have fallen. They are ignorant and illiterate; and, moreover, not being permitted to enter the Holy City, would not hear of the offered reward. It is worthy of remark that Milordo Malpas is the son of an eccentric father, who lately spent his whole fortune in purchasing an antique title. It was further observed by intelligent persons who met the young Englishman beyond the gate, that he carried his hat in his hand, though a fierce sun was beating down at the time; also, that his countenance wore a wild expression, as of grief or pain. Milordo's friends, however, may

rest assured that every inquiry and search will continue to be made for their missing compatriot."

"Poor Malpas!" I said to myself, as I came to the end of the paragraph. "Has he gone mad, too—mad for the love of that child?" And then I felt angry with myself for not having first thought of Miss Chilton.

Later on in the year, quite at the end of the summer, I learnt one thing more about my Roman friends from an English journal. It was a thing I would fain not have learnt, for it was the sudden death of Mr. Chilton at Albano. Poor fellow! His had been a kindly, generous nature, and the world was the poorer by his death. For myself, I mourned a princely patron, and I dared not think of the sorrow of his only child.

Count Gigi wrote to me after this sad event. He told me that the immediate cause of Mr. Chilton's death was sun-stroke, but that his health had suffered considerably of late from anxiety concerning the still unknown fate of his plighted son-in-law. The *signorina's* grief was terrible. She clung to his sister, and would not be separated from her. She would probably spend the winter with their mother in Rome. And then came a few words concerning the political state of Italy, which was, just then, growing interesting; and an assurance that the *contessina's* health was improving, though it would be a long time before she would be again as strong as she had been.

I don't know how nor why it was, but I suddenly grew restless as I read this letter. I had been contented enough in

England hitherto, but now I longed for Rome—Rome, which had been my home for fifteen years,—Rome, which I loved as the Jews loved Jerusalem, and Londoners are beginning to love London, so they tell me,—Rome, which had been the birth-place and death-place of my Virginia, and which still held all that remained of her beauty. I could remain away no longer—let me go.

I had made friends among the English people after all. They liked me in a way, I think, and would fain have kept me amongst them. They knew of my fame, and had heard of my loss. But they could not console me. Let me go.

I had stayed with my sister in the Fens, and had made the acquaintance of a whole brood of yellow-headed, rosy-cheeked nieces. English girls are, no

doubt, delightful when you know them ; but, as the Irishman said, “they tak’ a deal o’ knowing.” My nieces were all exactly alike, except in the matter of size, wherein they resembled a flight of steps (wooden ones). Even their ideas seemed to have been supplied to them by contract. This was an advantage, in one way, no doubt, as when I knew one, I knew all. But it was not very amusing, and it seemed to me my marble friends in Rome were pleasanter to talk to—as well as better to look at. Let me go.

I was as a widower deprived of the light of mine eyes, and the joy of my home ; *they* would comfort me. I was as a bereaved mother, and *there* lay the grave of my firstborn and only child. Let me go.

Do widowers wed a second time ? Does a living child wipe away the tears

that have been shed over a dead one? Mothers, and lovers—ay, and artists too—know.

Such things seemed to me possible in Rome—impossible in England. Let me go!





CHAPTER XIV.

MARY.

“Women will love her, that she is a woman
More worth than any men ; men, that she is
The rarest of all women.”

Winter's Tale.



WENT. I could be restrained no longer. I must at least get back as far as Florence, so as to be near my beloved Rome in this, her hour of danger.

I found matters even more advanced than I had expected, when I reached Florence, towards the latter end of Sep-

tember. The whole place was in a state of wild excitement, and the rumours from Rome were of the most intense and sensational nature. I ventured to doubt some of these, and was hooted for my pains.

Meanwhile, as it is an ill wind that blows no one any good (I think I must take that proverb as my family motto henceforward), it seemed to me that Rome being in such a whirlwind of excitement and expectation, the mere presence within her walls, of a harmless sculptor, whose breath would not stir a straw, could not be a matter of much importance. I consulted Gigi on this point, and he confirmed my opinion. I started for Rome by the first train I could after the receipt of his letter.

My old rooms were ready for me. No

one had occupied them during my absence. Cecco received me with effusion, and went out joyfully to collect my various treasures, which had been hospitably received and lodged by sundry among my brother artists whilst I had been away.

I wandered about among the empty niches and dusty unused easels, and thought of—my Virginia!

Whilst I was thus employed, Conte Gigi came in. The boy was in the Guardia Nobile—as *il cugino di monsignore*, he could hardly have been anything else—and he looked very handsome and proud in his gay glittering uniform.

“The *signorina* returns to-day,” he said, after a few pretty words of welcome.

“Ah!—and the *sorellina*?” I asked, with a smile.

“The *sorellina*, too, of course,” he

replied, answering my smile with a blush. Then we both laughed a little.

When we talked of public affairs, however, the boy grew graver. There was a struggle at hand, that was evident. It would be a fierce one, probably a bloody one, and it was impossible to predict the consequences. The Garibaldini were strong in numbers, and stronger still in sympathisers. A single victory on their side would suffice to set all the States of the Church aflame with enthusiasm. Most of the clerical party were despondent. Monsignore Salvini, however, was confident of success, and more excitable than ever.

“And Malpas?” I asked, at the first convenient pause, in this flood of valuable information. “Has anything been heard of him?”

“Not a word,” replied the boy. “*Il cugino* believes he has joined some Garibaldian regiment, and that we shall meet—he and I—hand to hand, on the battlefield. I do not know, whether *monsignore* has any reason for thinking this; but he has a sort of second sight, you know, and his predictions usually come true. That was why I quoted his opinion just now.”

“But Malpas was never a fellow to do this sort of thing. He would be losing so much,” I urged.

“Oh! I don’t know. He was always a wild lawless boy, you remember; and if he got into any scrape, he would be just the sort of fellow to run away, and try to lose himself for a time. Not that I see how he was likely to get into any scrape here,” he added quickly. “And you must

not speak of this to the *signorina*, Travers."

"Ah—the *signorina*! it is hard for her. How does she bear it, *conte mio*?"

"She never speaks of it," replied Gigi, emphatically. "Once I mentioned Malpas's name before the *sorellina*, and the *signorina* held up her finger to stop me, and afterwards followed me to the door to ask me not to do so again. That was long ago, while Virginia was still very ill; but, of course, I have never done so since." And then the young fellow enlarged once more upon Miss Chilton's many gifts and graces, a point towards which his conversation in those days had always a tendency to drift.

I did not wonder at it. Even I—who loved her not, except as men love women, and the best among them best, though

not always with closest love,—even I, could not help marvelling at the angelic tenderness and patience of Miss Chilton. Had she, indeed, so borne her double sorrow—her lover’s strange absence and her father’s sad death—and not grown the harder, but rather the sweeter, for the pain? Had she, indeed, so nursed the *contessina*, knowing, as she must have known, and had known for some time, I fancy, what had been going on between her lover and her friend, and not shrunk from the deed? Did she still love him—still love her? Or had she done it all, only out of a sense of duty—a word which stands to women pretty much as the word “honour” stands to men? I could not tell—how could I?—but it seemed to me, that had she not loved she would have acted otherwise. Love must be the

mainspring of such characters as Mary Chilton's—love of God, manifested in charity toward men.

I saw the friends arrive that night, but that was all I saw of them for many days. The *contessa* was ill in bed, with anxiety and fear, and I did not venture to call on Miss Chilton, or the *contessina*. Gigi, moreover, had been sent to Velletri, to command a company of Zouaves there. — So, for some time, I heard little, and saw less, of the people in the Palazzo opposite.

Meanwhile, October grew on, and the clamour and rumour of things to be waxed louder and louder. Sounds of firing were heard by day, and the glimmer of the camp fires, burning far away out into the Campagna, was seen by night. There were disturbances within and without the city, and daily attacks at many of

the gates. Bomb and Orsini shells were thrown about the streets. The women grew pale, and the men shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders expressively. No one believed in Monsignore Salvini's expectations; and, indeed, at that time the tide of fortune seemed to have set dead against the hopes of the Papal party.

One day Miss Chilton sent for me.

There had been hard fighting the day before, outside the Piazza del Popolo, and all the morning a long procession of carts and carriages, full of dead and wounded soldiers, had gone up the streets of Rome to the various hospitals and burying-grounds. I had looked out once or twice, and had seen these things go by, and had seen also that the *jalousies* of the Palazzo opposite were closely shut.

Miss Chilton had gone back to her old

rooms in the first floor of the Palazzo Salvini; and the *contessina*, I knew, spent as much time as she could spare from her mother with her orphaned friend. She was not with her now, however. Miss Chilton was alone—alone with all those empty chairs and sofas set about her, which are so often the outward signs of aching voids and never-to-be-filled-up gaps within,—alone, in those heavy black robes, which are the written characters of so much unutterable and unspeakable anguish and woe.

“Mr. Travers,” she began, clasping her hands together tremulously, and speaking in a low, hurried voice, “I want you to help me, please. I hear there are some ambulances being formed to go out, and nurse the wounded soldiers, and I want to join one of them.”

“*You*—join an ambulance!” I cried, involuntarily glancing at her girlish, shrinking form, and small delicate face and hands. “Pardon me, Miss Chilton; but what would your friends say if they knew?”

“I have so few friends,” she answered sadly. “Indeed, I seem to have hardly any except those I have here—Virginia and the *contessa*; and you, too, I hope I may count among the number—may I not, Mr. Travers?”

“And Conte Gigi,” I said stupidly. I was utterly bewildered by the nature of the girl’s desires.

“And Conte Gigi,” she replied calmly; “but, unfortunately, he is now at Velletri. Had he been here I should have asked him to help me; as it is, I ask you. Oh, do not turn away and look so grave. Do

help me, please, Mr. Travers. I have been accustomed to nursing, as you know, and—and—I do so want something to do.”

Who could resist her any longer? Who could resist any woman who put forward her “rights,” or her plea for work, after that fashion?

I reflected a moment.

“Your American friend, Mrs. Cato B. Tappen, has just formed an ambulance,” I said slowly, “and she has also turned her own house into a private hospital. She is in want of nurses for both places, I know, and I think hospital-nursing would suit you best,” I added, feeling that a battle-field was hardly the place for so young a woman, but not knowing quite how to express my feelings.

She understood at once, however.

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "I would rather have gone out to the wounded, certainly, had it been possible for me to do so; but, after all, I only want to be useful."

"There is no doubt of your being that," I answered warmly. "And I think we can trust to Mrs. Tappen finding the right sort of work for you. Shall I go and make some inquiries of her for you?"

"No, I will go myself. She lives quite close, I know, and my maid is ready."

"And you will let me know the result?" I said, taking up my hat.

"Could you not stay here till I know myself?" she returned, growing rather excited over the prospect of her wishes being thus speedily realized. "I mean, could you not wait here till I return. The

contessina will be down directly. It is just her time—so you will not be dull. And you might think of another plan for me, in case this one should fail.”

She disappeared—and I waited, of course.

It seemed a long time, but I have no idea how long it really was.

At last she came, opening the door very slowly, and walking very languidly—the little bright, brisk *contessina*, who used to flit up and down the steep twisting stairs of the Palazzo as blithely as a butterfly.

She started when she saw me, and her face flushed a little, then grew very pale. She walked across the room, however, calmly and steadily enough, and held out her hand.

As for me, I took it silently, and looked

at her again and again. I had not realized before how severe her illness had been, and Gigi had not prepared me for this. Her face had grown thinner and smaller, her eyes bigger and bluer than ever. All her hair—her pretty soft brown hair, with the golden lights in it—had been cut off during the fever, and was only just now beginning to grow again, and curl at the ends like a little boy's. She was not a bit pretty now, and yet there was something about her—something in the strange luminousness of her sweet white face, something in the solemn depths of her shadowy blue eyes, that made me feel inclined to kneel down and worship her. It was as if she had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and stood in the very presence of God Himself, since I had seen her last. And, in truth,

had she not done so? For had she not tasted both of pain and of love?

“Are you horrified at my appearance?” she said, with a shadow of her old sunny smile. “By-the-by, I believe I owe to you that I am able to appear at all. Come, and sit down, and let me thank you.”

We sat down side by side on one of the empty sofas, and talked about—Miss Chilton, of course. Had Miss Chilton been any one else except Miss Chilton, I think I should have tired of her long ago, as the Greeks did of Aristides. As it was, however, I did not faint with weariness of the subject, and she came in before her praises were concluded. I think, however, she would have done that in any case.

I saw at once by her face that her

mission had been a successful one, and rose to congratulate her accordingly.

“Mrs. Tappen will take me at once as an hospital nurse ; at any rate, at first,” she said to me. Then, kneeling down beside her friend, she added in her sweet, sad voice, “Virginia, dearest, I am going to have some more patients now. Did you not know? Has not Mr. Travers told you? What can you have been talking about all this time, then? And it was he who helped me to it—helped me to accomplish my wish of going out to nurse the wounded soldiers. You will give me a good character, will you not?”

The sick girl drew her breath quickly, and flung her arms round her friend's neck.

“Oh, Mary dear! you know—you know. I only wish I could go with you; but I

do not feel as if I should ever be of any use to any one now—and I never was very ornamental, was I? Once, long ago, I longed to be a grown-up woman; but now that I am one, it seems to make no difference, after all. The bump was too great, I suppose. It nearly swamped my little boat. Will it be useless all my life, do you think?"

She looked at me as she spoke, but I could not answer her. My heart was too full for words.

Miss Chilton, however, was ready. It was her nature to be so always, I think.

"My dear, my dear, you mistake," she said, clasping the girl in her arms, and speaking in a far-away sort of voice, which sounded like a sweet, solemn chant going on inside a church, while we, her auditors, were as worshippers standing

outside, and listening. "Indeed, you mistake, dear. No life need be useless—no boat can be swamped, as you express it—unless its owner chooses. It does not matter what we are—'sick or healthful, slave or free'—if only we can make each other a little holier, and happier, and nobler;—nor what we do, if only by our means we can cause a single human soul to grow bigger, and braver, and better—as painters do by their pictures, and poets by their poems, and women by their love, nay, by their weakness, too, sometimes,—as you have done for me, Virginia."

I think they had forgotten my presence, and I slipped away unperceived.

As I thought over these words, I began to understand at last the guiding power of Mary's life, and the nature of the tie that bound her to Virginia. I do not

know whether you, my readers, will do so too.

And the Lord said, "I will draw them with cords of a man, with bands of love."





CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THE CARNIVAL FIGURE MEANT.

“Boys from distant farm and village,
Wearing yet the dress of home,
Hastened on by bayonets pricking,
Wondering, at the streets of Rome,
Like a flock of sheep in terror
As the soldiers hemmed them in ;
Black-robed priests around them swarming,
Monk and Friar and Capuchin.”

MISS PEARSON.

THE struggle was over ; the French troops had arrived ; the battle of Mentana had been fought, and lost, and won ; the Garibaldian hopes

were quenched in blood, and Monsignore Salvini's confident expectations had been justified by Papalino success.

He was always right—Gigi had said so,—always.

The boy had escaped unhurt, and had won his first laurels. He had managed to send in a message to his mother after the battle. His general spoke well of him, and he was to ride into Rome to-day with the Papal and French staffs.

There was mourning in many houses, no doubt, and aching fear and anxiety in others, but there was joy in the Palazzo Salvini, and all the friends of the family flocked thither to offer their congratulations. The *contessa* rose from her bed to receive them. I presented myself among the rest.

The *contessina* was there, of course.

She smiled a little when she saw me, and told me that Miss Chilton had been sent for that morning, to go out and bring back some of the wounded soldiers from Mentana. "It must be a fearful sight," she said, with a shudder—"a battle-field, and all the dead people lying about. But Mary will not be frightened. She says she fears God too much to be afraid of anything else."

Monsignore came up as she spoke. His whole person was radiant with triumph. In the fulness of his heart he had evidently forgotten our last meeting, or rather parting, and griped my hand most heartily. Then he addressed himself to the *contessina*.

"You must really come and see the staff ride in, little cousin," he said in his harsh, grating voice. "It will be a grand

sight. The prisoners are to be brought in too—nearly two thousand of them; and the Holy Father has promised to be present, as well as all the cardinals and princes now in Rome. No, do not shake your head. You are strong enough now, and it is your duty to witness the triumph of the Church, and the downfall of her enemies,” he added, rolling his eyes about in a sort of frenzy.

The *contessina* winced a little.

“I would rather not,” she began. But the *contessa* interposed.

“*Figlia mia*, I think you ought to go,” she said, in her soft, plaintive voice. “Gigi would be pleased to see you, and in duty to the Church the Salvinis have never failed. Only take care of her, *cugino mio*,” she added, turning a little anxiously to the priest, and looking at him rather keenly.

As she was to go I would go too, and accordingly took my leave.

It was a beautiful sight, if not exactly a grand one. The streets were crowded with people on foot and in carriages. The Holy Father was there, as Monsignore Salvini had promised; and the Neapolitan royal family, and all the great Papalino people. But for some time I could not find the *contessina* anywhere.

It was impossible to tell what was the leading feeling among the crowd, whether sympathy with, or sorrow at, the event of the day. The priests went shouldering their way in and out, gesticulating wildly, and with a cruel, wicked smile on their dark faces; but the people, for the most part were as still, and silent, and staring as a stolid British crowd.

There were one or two scuffles, how-

ever, which was British also, no doubt. I saw a man knocked down because he pushed before a priest. I also saw another, a priest, swoon suddenly and fall. He was a high ecclesiastic, I think; and I fancy I saw the gleam of violet stockings, and heard the sound of a harsh voice crying, "*Viva la Chiesa!*" as the people gathered round the man and dragged him away. So I suppose Monsignore Salvini must have been somewhere among the crowd. But I could not see much, and I did not care at all. I was only looking for the *contessina*.

I found her at last, leaning back in a carriage, which had been drawn up a little way out of the crowd. She looked pale and listless, and utterly exhausted. Filoména, who sat opposite to her, was infinitely more vivacious. Her old face

shone with excitement, her bright black eyes went glancing hither and thither, and everywhere. It is a way old people have ; and it might be a comfort to us, who are still struggling in the wash and the waves, to see that others have pushed through the foam, to the deep still waters beyond. Only, unfortunately, whilst we are still in the wash, we never seem to see anything except the bits of stick and spar, that the waves drift backwards and forwards, and almost always beyond our reach.

“Where is *monsignore* ? ” I asked of the *contessina*. “I thought he was to have come with you ? ”

“So he did,” she replied ; “but he left me a little while ago, and asked me to wait here till he returned. I suppose he will be back soon. I only wish the troops would come. I am so tired.”

They came as she spoke—a brilliant staff of officers, in their gay uniforms, clattering down the street, escorted by a troop of dragoons. Gigi was the handsomest, as well as the youngest, of them ; but his face was very grave, and his smile stern and sad, as he saluted his sister. Poor fellow, he had learnt to-day, from many a comrade's speechless face and lifeless form, the terrible cost of war.

“Are you going now?” I asked, as the clattering of horses and clanking of swords died away in the distance. There was no other sound nor sign. Not a hat was lifted, not a *viva* raised to greet the conquerors. The people had drawn back a little, and let the staff pass through them in silence. That was all.

“I do not know,” replied the *contessina* wearily. “I suppose I ought to

wait for *monsignore*." So I waited too.

The afternoon drew on. The sun set majestically. Over the hill-tops there was a sudden flush, as if of shame at finding themselves still up after their lord, the sun, had gone to bed;—then they, too, pulled on their night-caps of mist;—and the sapphire sky deepened into amethyst;—and the moon, sickle-shaped, sailed up slowly, and flung its cold, steely light into the pale, upturned faces of those who had been mowed down like grass on the field of Mentana. But still Monsignore tarried.

"He means you to wait and see the prisoners come in," I said to the *contessina*. And whether he meant it or not, she waited.

They came at last, seventeen hundred

of them, huddled together like sheep, and guarded by gendarmes with fixed bayonets. Most of them were mere boys, under twenty years of age; but there were a few elder men scattered amongst them, and, here and there, an English face or two, with stern sad eyes, and stalwart drooping frames. The crowd received them in silence—the same dull, profound silence with which they had greeted the conquerors.

After the prisoners had passed, there came a sadder sight still—a procession of little jolting carriages, and rough country carts, bearing the wounded from the battle-field. They had been coming in since the early morning, and this was probably a last relay delayed on the road by the file of prisoners marching in front of them. I tried to turn the *contessina's*

.

carriage, but I was too late. One could not impede the progress of the dying to save the living from a sickening sight. Nor did she seem to recoil from it as much as might have been expected. She shuddered a little at first, and covered her face with her hands; but afterwards she removed them, and seemed to find a strange sort of fascination in watching the sad procession. It was almost as if she were looking out for some one.

Suddenly she clutched my arm.

“Is that the *signorina*?” she asked, in a shrill, sharp voice, pointing to a little open carriage, still a long way off, in which sat a lady, holding up a wounded unconscious man. “And is that a Garibaldian by her side? Tell me—oh, tell me, please! I cannot see well.”

It *was* the *signorina*, and she knew it.

It *was* a Garibaldian—a volunteer who had been shot in the head, and who was dressed in a coarse red shirt and fustian trousers, but who had small white hands like a gentleman's, and dark-brown hair, curling under the blood-stained bandage ; and she knew not only what, but *who*, he was.

The little open carriage passed close beside the one in which the *contessina* sat, but Miss Chilton did not see her friend. Her arms supported the unconscious man ; her fair head was bent over his ; her lips were moving as if in prayer. They were the last of the sad procession, and the *contessina's* coachman turned his horses' heads as the *carrozzella* passed, and we drove home in silence.

We encountered the *carrozzella* again, however. It came clattering out from

under the archway as we reached the Palazzo. It was empty now; only the cushions stained with blood, the wheels clogged with grass and mud, remained to tell the sad story of whence it had come, and what manner of burthen it had brought.

“That—that Garibaldian,” said the *contessina*, catching her breath, as I lifted her out of the carriage, “was Sir Wilfrid Malpas; and this is what the Carnival figure meant.”





CHAPTER XVI.

RIGHT AFTER ALL!

*“Ser hermosa y ser pura ; esa es su gloria ;
Ser tierna y consolar es su destino ;
Amar, sufrir, llorar ; esa es su historia.”*

DON LEOPOLDO DE CUETO.

MISS CHILTON sent for me that night.

I knew what it was for ; indeed, I was just meditating going over to see whether I could be of any use to poor Malpas, when the summons came.

They had carried him into Monsignore Salvini's room, and laid him down on the

violet velvet sofa, amid the pictures, and swinging lamps, and other ecclesiastic knick-knacks in which the priest's heart delighted. I looked round a little puzzled as the old servant ushered me in. Monsignore's character appeared to me in a new light, since he could throw open his doors to a wounded Garibaldian.

"Monsignore is gone," said old Giuseppe, in an explanatory tone of voice. "He was called away this afternoon on one of his sudden missions, as *il Signor Scultore* no doubt knows. So we carried the wounded man in here. It was the nearest room, and we shall get things straight again before *monsignore* returns. *Povero monsignore!* his absences have been longer and his calls more frequent than ever of late——" The old man spoke mysteriously, and looked as if he

expected me to understand more than he said. But I didn't. I was only thinking of Malpas.

The surgeon was with him at that moment, and so was Mrs. Tappen, and a *sœur de charité* the doctor had brought with him. He had plenty of nurses, poor fellow, but he was not going to need their services long.

The two girls were clinging together in another part of the room. Miss Chilton came forward when she saw me.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Travers," she said, in a low, steady voice. "He is very quiet now, and has not recognized any of us yet; but the doctor says he may become delirious before——" She could not finish her sentence, calmly and quietly though she spoke.

The *contessina* said nothing. She

hung back, and looked at me a little fixedly. She was evidently only just able to control herself, and I think she would have screamed had she tried to speak.

The doctor and Mrs. Tappen went away at last. They had other patients to attend to, and they knew they could be of no more use here. They took the *sœur de charité* with them, and left me alone with the still unconscious dying man.

I had persuaded the girls to go and rest a while, on condition of calling them instantly should any change occur. That seemed unlikely now. The poor fellow lay in a sort of stupor, with his bandaged head thrown back among the velvet cushions, and his grey, bloodless hands hanging down motionless by his side.

He might die thus, I thought. But I was wrong.

About the fifth watch of the night, just when the darkness was beginning to tremble into dawn, he opened his eyes slowly, and looked round him. For a moment he was bewildered, I think, and knew not where he was. Then, suddenly, he comprehended everything. Death, which is such a mystery to the living, is a great revealer to the dying; and at his approach, all the little feeble secrets and tangles of life, which once were deemed so all-important, so all-engrossing, unveil their faces, and shrivel up into nothingness.

“Jack, old fellow,” he said hoarsely; “you always have been good to me. Will you do one thing more for me? Will you tell her——” His voice grew

clearer as he spoke, but he gasped for breath here.

“Her! her!—whom do you mean? The *contessina*—or——” I say, blundering on at my old misconception.

“No, no, no!” he cried impatiently, as if feeling he had much to say, and but little time to say it in. “That was all a mistake, and the child knew it;—but Mary may not, perhaps: Mary, whom I loved so perfectly, though I tried to hate her at first, because our fathers made up the marriage—mine for money, hers for position; Mary, whom I loved so passionately, though I faltered in my love for a moment; Mary, whom I loved so purely I dared not return to her with the faintest stain on my heart, but had rather die dreaming of her weeping over my memory. And then came the

war," he went on, half raising himself on his elbows, and growing more and more excited ; "and the Garibaldians were in need of volunteers. It was a noble cause, and if one did get shot, that seemed to me a good death to die, and one she would like to hear of. But I was ill before that, you know—ill for many months, of Roman fever, in a shepherd's hut in the Campagna, and I wrote her a letter there, for I was very near death several times then. Old Beppo has it still. Get it from him, Jack, and give it to her ; it will tell her——"

"Hush !" I said soothingly. "Calm yourself a little, my poor boy, and you shall tell her yourself. She is here."

"Here !" he cried, with a great glad look in his eyes. "Here ! Oh, Jack, call her at once. Only, call her quickly."

She came as he spoke. She had heard his voice, and thought me faithless, and came without being called. The *contessina* followed her. I suppose Miss Chilton had not the heart, as I certainly had not the right, to bid her keep away.

As chance would have it, too, the dying man saw her first—or, at least, spoke to her first.

“Virginia, child, is that you?” he said, feebly stretching out his hand. “Come a little closer, and let me ask your forgiveness, for the sake of old times. I sinned against you once, I know, but we were good friends before that; and now, now, will you not forgive me?—at least, as enemies forgive their dying foes?”

She shuddered—she shook in every limb—but he held her hand fast in his



"It's all right now, is it not?"
P. 256.



dying grasp, and she managed to murmur—

“If I have anything to forgive, I do forgive you from the bottom of my heart, Sir Wilfrid Malpas.”

He gazed at her for a moment with a look of unspeakable gratitude and meaning. Then he smiled at me, and withdrew his hand from hers by placing it in mine; and so turned, with a sigh of relief, wholly, entirely, altogether to Miss Chilton.

“Mary, my own!” he cried, with a great, sudden gush of passionate love, “I do not ask *you* to forgive me—I only ask *you* to understand.”

She let him hold her hand between both his, but she stood up herself stately, and tall, and calm as ever.

“My Wilfrid,” she said, in a faint,

sweet, sad voice, "there is nothing to understand. I knew you loved me—always."

Then she stooped down ;—she pressed her lips to his ;—he wound his arms about her, he held her against his heart ;—and these two, parted for a time by the pride, and malice, and misconceptions of life, were made one, at last, in death.

"Come away," I said to the *contessina*, whose hand I still held, and who now let me lead her quickly away into the next room. "Let us leave them alone together."

She looked back once, as I pulled down the curtain that separated the two rooms.

"Oh, Dacko, Dacko !" she cried, hiding her head on my shoulder, just as

she used to do when she was quite a little child; "it's all right now, is it not? Once it was different. That morning on the steps—do you remember? He made a mistake then—and so did I—and so did you, too, Dacko, I think. But it has come right at last! It is all right now, is it not?—all right for us all!"





CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER TWO YEARS.

"I were but little happy, could I say how much !"

Much Ado About Nothing.

MONSIGNORE Salvini never returned to his rooms on the *entresol* of the Palazzo. They remained unlet for a considerable time, and then presently were taken by a sculptor and his wife, who occupy them still ;—but stay—this is getting on too fast.

The cause of Monsignore's non-return to Rome was also the cause of his many





"My Statue started up before me once more."
P. 265.



sudden disappearances, and so-called missions—namely, a timely visit to a *maison de santé*, in the north of Italy. The poor man had long been subject to sudden fits of insanity, and it was his habit, whenever he felt one of these coming on, to retire to the said spot for a time. When the attack was over, he would emerge once more, and resume his usual occupation till the next “call” came. The last attack, however, which had been accelerated by the excitement of passing events, was more serious than any which preceded it, and he never wholly rallied from it. After one or two brief intervals of reason, he died in a paroxysm of madness, waving his crucifix over his head, and crying, “*Viva la chiesa! viva la chiesa!*” till his breath failed him.

When I heard this (it was Gigi who told me, and neither he nor his sister had ever suspected such a thing; though, on looking back, it seemed not impossible that the *contessa*, their mother, had done so shortly before her own death), I could not help thinking of the day after the battle of Mentana, when I had seen the gleam of violet stockings flash out suddenly, and then disappear amid a crowd of black-robed priests and monks. Had I not heard, too, a harsh voice shout out the self-same words, "*Viva la chiesa!*—so shall all our enemies be scattered!" and then suddenly grow silent?

I was thinking of this as I parted from the young fellow, and pushed open the door of my studio.

It was a church *festa*, and my workmen had a holiday. My studio was not de-

served, however. There was a rustle as I entered—a rustle behind the curtain that had once hidden my Virginia,—a quick movement, a joyous cry, and my statue started up before me once more, with eager eyes, and tumbled hair, and hands that let fall the tablets (in other words, a packet of letters) as she ran forward to meet me.

“Ah! how my darling loved me! How glad she was
to hear
My footstep on the threshold,”

I murmured to myself as I looked, and laughed, and looked again.

It was as if the statue had never been, and the child had been there always. Only, God be praised, it was *His* handiwork now instead of mine.

“Oh, Dacko, Dacko, how long you

have been out (the exact period was half an hour), "and I have so much to tell you," cries the statue, flinging herself into my arms, and ruffling my hair under pretence of smoothing it.

I press her against my heart.

"Well, have we not the whole day before us, *cara mia*?" I say, with a smile that is tremulous with happiness. "And all our lives too, for that matter, my own darling." There is no limitation to epithets now, you see.

"Yes—yes—yes; but I want to know this at once, and you must explain it to me. See!" she said, slipping out of my arms and picking up her letters with childish eagerness; "this is from *il povero cugino*, who is dead; and he says—he says" (fumbling over the leaves, and growing rather incoherent in her speech)

“that he cannot die till he has made confession to me of one thing. That horrible black-robed figure at the Carnival—do you remember, Dacko?—well, read this: it was he who planned it and arranged it. He wanted to frighten me out of my fancy for some one—he does not say who—and make me obey him. And then, you see, he breaks off, and says *you* must tell me the rest, and you must forgive him, too, Dacko, for you will know all by this time, and understand all. *Do* you understand, dear? Please, please tell me, if you do.”

“I think I understand,” I say slowly, turning over the leaves of the poor priest’s letter, which had been written in the last interval of reason, when he had felt the approach of death, as distinctly as he had formerly felt the approach of his mental

attacks. "I think I understand, but I am not quite sure that I can explain to you, *carina* ; at least, not just now."

She pouted a little.

"That is what you always say when I ask you to tell me how your statue was broken,—and why you went to England, two years ago, when I was ill."

"Why should I tell you?" I answer with a smile—"since *I* have come back to Rome, and my statue has come back to me, not broken at all, but alive instead of dead?"

"Alive instead of dead," she repeated musingly. And the pout melted away from her lips like the frost before the sun, and a sweet, grave, far-away look grew into her eyes. "Dacko, I am a woman now—really a woman, am I not?"

"You are a wife, at any rate," I reply evasively. And for once she was not insulted.

"And yet I still think as I thought when I was a child, that life is better, of more worth, and more use than death, because of love, you know."

"And so do I," I cry, as I clasp her once more in my arms. "The other was a pagan sentiment, fit only for the statue."

And then, for a time, we both were silent. By-and-by, however, she raised her head, and glanced out of the window.

"Dacko, see—there is Mary coming out of the Palazzo. Do go and ask her to drive with us into the Campagna this afternoon. It is going to be a beautiful day, and we working people must make the most of our *festa*, you know."

I crossed the street, and arrested Miss Chilton just as she was stepping into her carriage. I made known to her my wife's desires. But she shook her head.

"Not to-day, thank you, Mr. Travers," she said gently. "And please thank Virginia for me, too. Another time I should like it very much, but not to-day." Her hands were full of autumn flowers, crimson and brown and gold, and I heard her give the order, "Protestant cemetery," as the carriage rolled off.

It was the second anniversary of the Battle of Mentana.

Virginia had remembered it too when I returned to her.

"After all," she said, looking up at me with misty eyes; "it does not much matter whether it be life or death—it

there is only love. For, to those who love, there can be no such thing as death."

* * * * *

Conte Gigi has never married. He is still in the Guardia Nobile, though he no longer wears his splendid uniform, nor rides about on his big black horse; but is mostly on duty, *en retraite*, at the Vatican, by command of his spiritual *generalissimo*. He still humbly and hopelessly adores Miss Chilton, who lives in her old rooms in the Palazzo, and makes flying visits to England, from the first of which occasions she returned with an ancient *gouvernante* of forbidding aspect and indisputable respectability. He still bullies his sister on the old subject.

"So you *have* married an English-

man after all, *sorellina mia*," he says, now and then, with his old ringing, teasing laugh.

Whereupon Virginia—my Virginia,—not Macaulay's Virginia,—nor even Virginia dei Salvini,—nor any one else's Virginia—but mine—my very own,—my dear, dear wife, will answer—

"Dacko may have been born in England" (that is a fact too hard to be overcome), "but he has lived in Rome almost all his life."

"And he hopes to die in Rome too, if such be God's good will," the subject of their conversation murmurs under his breath.

For life, our life at least, having come right through love, we do not now fear to think of death. The old misconceptions have been cleared away,

the past blunders and bungles have become disentangled, and are set straight. We shall make other mistakes, no doubt, but they will not be lasting ones. The knowledge of the past gives us hope for the future.

There are other lives less happy than ours—lives full of mistakes and blunders, some of them inherited ones, perhaps, some of them worked in so long ago, that it seems almost hopeless to try and pull them out now. And yet even these may be smoothed out a little, worked over, obliterated, as it were, by patience and perseverance, by unceasing watchfulness and unfailing care. We cannot tell, indeed, why this fate, or that, should be ours. . . . we can but bow to Him who rules it so. Only, when the sun shines for us, when the brave

summer days are ours, when we bask in the glow, and revel in the roses, let us pray that we do not forget those for whom it is winter. The antipodes exist for us all. And if these words of ours serve to warm any hearts, or to soothe any souls, or to inspire any spirits to face life, past and future—ay, and 'present, too, which is often the hardest of all—a little more bravely, a little more hopefully, then we shall feel that Virginia the Statue was not broken, nor Virginia the Story written, in vain.

THE END.

...

...

.....

;

•
•
•
•

•
•
•
•
•

—

